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MEDITATIONS FOR ADVENT;

OR,

SHORT READINGS
ON THE
FIRST AND SECOND COMING
OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

BY

DANIEL MOORE, M.A.,

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE QUEEN, AND PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S.
AUTHOR OF "SUNDAY MEDITATIONS," "HULSEAN LECTURES," ETC.



P R E F A C E .

ENCOURAGED by the success of a volume of "SUNDAY MEDITATIONS," adapted to the course of the CHRISTIAN YEAR, the writer has thought that a supplementary series of Readings, limited to a special subject, but similar to the former Meditations in their general style and treatment, might meet with like favourable acceptance.

In the selection of a subject for such a purpose, no division of the Christian year appeared to be so fruitful of suggestions for devout meditation, as the solemn weeks of ADVENT; especially if regard were had to that two-fold aspect of the season, so prominently brought before us in the selected readings of our Church,—first, the time when, taking our nature upon Him, the Lord Jesus came to "visit us in great humility;" and secondly, the day "when He shall come again in His glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and dead."

The work, therefore, is divided into two parts, with an equal number of Meditations on the FIRST

and the SECOND coming of our Lord and Saviour. Like as in the former volume, short sentences of Holy Scripture are put at the head of each Meditation;—not to be made the basis of formal exhortation, as in a sermon, nor the subject of any thing like critical exegesis, as in an exposition, but rather to serve as a key-note to the specified subject of meditation, and assisting the thoughts to follow in the track, where Holy Scripture leads the way.

If wisely treated, the subject cannot fail of interest to a devout mind. In tracing the august series of preparations for Christ's coming in the flesh, our gratitude must be stirred up by seeing how yearningly and how long the heart of a loving Father has been set upon our deliverance; whilst the anticipations of the Saviour's coming again, with all its sublime revelations and accompaniments, may well kindle in the hearts of each one of us, emotions of loftiest joy and hope, as well as of reverence and godly fear.

D. M.

HOLY TRINITY VICARAGE,
ADVENT, 1884.

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PART I.

Meditations on the First Coming.

When, Lord, O when shall we
Our dear salvation see?
 Arise, arise;
 Our fainting eyes
Have longed all night: and 'twas a long one too.
 Man never yet could say
 He saw more than one day,
 One day of Eden's seven:
The guilty hours, there blasted with the breath
 Of sin and death,
 Have, ever since, born a nocturnal hue.
But Thou hast given us hopes, that we,
At length, another day shall see,—
 Wherein each vile neglected place,
 Gilt with the aspect of Thy Face,
Shall be, like that, the porch and gate of heaven.

BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR. *Festival Hymn for Advent.*

Then, at last,
I, wrapping round me your humanity,
Which, being sustained, shall neither break nor burn
Beneath the fire of Godhead, will tread earth
And ransom you and it, and set strong peace
Betwixt you and its creatures. With my pangs
I will confront your sins: and, since those sins
Have sunken to all nature's heart from yours,
The tears of my clean soul shall follow them
And set a holy passion to work clear
Absolute consecration. In my brow
Of kingly whiteness, shall be crowned anew
Your discrowned human nature.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING. *A Drama of Exile.*

I.

Christ the Promise of all Ages.

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.”—
Heb. xiii. 8.

“Before Abraham was, I AM.”—John viii. 58.

“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”—Rev. xix. 10.

THE several dispensations of religion which God has given to mankind, are only connected parts of one great whole. They are not changes, but developments,—developments adapted to the progressive stages of human character, and to the advancement of human thought. The history of the Church, from the transactions of Eden to the close of time, is the history of Christ; the history of the mediatorial kingdom. In reading the Old Testament Scriptures, the one object which stands out for human contemplation,—the sun and centre of all the Divine purposes, the golden thread which runs through, and connects, and binds together all the counsels of an Infinite Mind,—is the promise of a Redeemer. The entire Levitical

ritual was but an undeveloped Gospel, the great facts of a coming Christianity set forth in parable.

This is the true explanation of the ancient economies, and of the successive manifestations of God to man. They all crystallize and meet in a personal Messiah. CHRIST was the Prophet whom Moses announced; the Priest after the order of Melchizedec whom David foresaw; the King whose spiritual victories inspired the rapt visions of Daniel and Isaiah. He was the Shiloh for whose salvation Jacob waited; the Kinsman-Redeemer whom Job knew he should see at the latter day upon the earth; the illustrious Seed whose day Abraham saw afar off, and in Whom our first parents rejoiced, as He Who should bruise the serpent's head. And other foreshadowings were vouchsafed to keep alive the expectation of Messiah in the minds of the Church at large. Typical sacrifices indicated the one great Sacrifice. Typical Saviours were the heralds of One Who should be "able to save to the uttermost." Typical priests illustrated His eternal Priesthood, and typical kings prefigured the supreme dominion of Him Whom God hath set upon His holy hill of Zion. Of all Old Testament history the witness is one and the theme one:—"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Before considering any special prophecies of the promised Messiah, it may be well to touch upon certain ANGELIC APPEARANCES under the Old Testament, which, both by Jewish and Christian commentators, are regarded as pre-incarnate manifestations of Him that should come into the world. In the accounts of celestial visitations, made to the patriarchs in the early ages, we cannot fail to notice that there is commonly one individual Angel, whose language is more lofty and authoritative, and who assumes a higher degree of majesty and importance than the rest. This mysterious Personage is, on most occasions, called the "Angel of the Lord;" and is the same who, in the prophets, is called the "Messenger of the Covenant,"* or the "Angel of the presence of God."† And the one point of agreement between Jewish and Christian writers, is, that this Angel is no other than the Personal Messiah, speaking in the name of the Invisible Father, and in such manifestations, giving a pledge to mankind of His future coming upon the earth.

Let us note one or two of the more remarkable of these appearances. Take, for example, that which occurs in the history of Hagar.

It was on

* Mal. iii. 1. † Isa. lxiii. 9

the occasion of her flight from the cruel treatment and jealousy of her mistress, when she fell down, faint and exhausted, by the well of Lahai-roi, in the desert of Shur. Alone, and in her misery, the “Angel of the Lord” found her by the fountain of water in the wilderness. “And He said, Hagar, whence comest thou and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands I will multiply thy seed exceedingly that it shall not be numbered for multitude And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, ‘Thou God seest me;’ for she said, Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?”* whilst, in giving a name to the well which had been the scene of this wondrous transaction, she calls it Beer-lahai-roi, or the well of the Living One.

Take, as another example, the account of that memorable wrestling of Jacob with the Angel, on his return from Padan-Aram, and when, in dread of a meeting with his justly offended brother Esau, on the morrow, he had resolved to spend the night in prayer. “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the

* Gen. xvi. 13.

day." In that mysterious conflict, and no doubt to brace up his spirits for the dreaded interview, he was permitted to come off victorious. And, at the end of the encounter, and after an inquiry of Jacob as to his name, "the Angel said unto him, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."* Here, independently of expressions in the narrative itself, difficult to reconcile with the supposition that he was a created angel, with whom Jacob wrestled, we have corroborative testimonies to the received view from other Scriptures, which seem to put the question beyond dispute. First, in the reference to this event by Jacob, when on his death-bed, this angel is distinctly declared to be God Himself:—"God before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk:—the God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the Angel which redeemed me from all evil bless the lads."† Nor less conclusive is the reference to this transaction, in the twelfth chapter of the prophet Hosea:—"By his strength he had power with God: Yea he had power over the angel and pre-

* Gen. xxxii. 28-30.

† Gen. xlvi. 15, 16.

vailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial." Here the proof of a Messianic appearance is on the surface: and, taken in connection with other passages, can point but to one conclusion. He who, in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis, is called "a man," and with whom Jacob wrestled and prevailed, is by Hosea declared to be God Himself. The angel to whom Jacob made supplication and wept was the Angel-Jehovah, Whom, on his death-bed, he acknowledged as having fed him all along unto this day. Whilst, once more, it is declared by Hosea that He whom Jacob saw standing above the ladder at Bethel, and Who spake to him there, was in very deed "the Lord God of hosts: the Lord is his memorial."* Need we add to these proofs the name which Jacob gave to the scene of this memorable transaction, as proof of a pre-incarnate manifestation: "And Jacob called the place Peniel (that is, the face of God): for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."†

If to these testimonies we add that which is told us of the Angel of the Lord appearing to Balaam, and yet that, in allusion to the event, Balaam

* Hos. xii. 4, 5.

† Gen. xxxii. 30.

declares he had had “visions of the Almighty;”* or the appearance to Manoah and his wife, when this same Angel assumes to himself one of those titles of Messiah, grouped together in Isaiah, saying to Manoah: “Why askest thou my name—seeing it is Wonderful;”† or, once more, if we consider the manifestation to Joshua, where the Angel declares himself to be Captain of the Lord’s host; and, as such, allows Joshua to worship him,‡ an act which, both under the Old Testament and under the New, we find created angels expressly forbid,—the conclusion, I think, will be irresistible that, at sundry times and in divers manners, the Messiah did manifest Himself to men of old time in visible form,—a designed foreshadowing of His coming, and a pledge to assure us thereof.

The value of these pre-incarnation appearances of Messiah under the Old Testament, consists in the proof they furnish how intently, and how long the heart of God has been set upon our salvation; and how He would have all our hopes of it bound up with, and centre in a Personal Redeemer. From the fall of man to the nativity at Bethlehem, at longer or shorter intervals, Christ has come down to hold converse with those whom, from the eternal ages, it was His purpose to save and

* Num. xxiv. 16, 17. † Judges xiii. 18. ‡ Josh. v. 14.

deliver. The thought should be very comforting to us that the voice which spake to our first parents in the garden, in the cool of the day, is the same as that which, eighteen hundred years after, spake to Abraham in the plains of Mamre,* the same which two thousand years after held discourse with Nathaniel under the fig-tree.† We love to think that He Who was found of Hagar, when she sought Him not, “by a fountain of water in the wilderness,”‡ was afterwards found of another woman who sought Him not, when wearied and faint, He sat by Jacob’s well: § that He Who spake with Moses out of the burning but unconsumed bush,|| was He Who appeared to Ezekiel in a mantle of dazzling and awful brightness; ¶ was He before Whom John fell as one dead, in Whose hands were the seven stars and His eyes as a flame of fire.**

But why dwell we on these past appearances? “To them that look for Him,” we know that He shall appear again “without sin unto salvation,”—aye, appear in some glorified Incarnate form. As really as to Abraham by his tent, or to Jacob by the ford, or to the three children in the furnace, or to Gideon by the wine-

* Gen. xviii. 1. † John i. 50. ‡ Gen. xxi. 14.

§ John iv. 6. || Ex. iii. 2. ¶ Ezek. i. 28. ** Rev. i. 17.

press,—shall the Angel-Redeemer be manifested to us, standing at the latter day upon the earth:—Whom our eyes shall behold and not another: that in our flesh we may see God. Oh! are we all prepared to meet Him? Are we clothed in His righteousness? Are we washed from our sins in His Blood? Are we renewed in the image of Him Who created us, by the all-sanctifying agency of His blessed Spirit? Then shall we, of a truth, “see the King in His beauty.” Then shall we see the Manhood crowned in heaven. For not even there, shall we be without a sight of the Incarnation; without beholding the face of our Goel-Redeemer, our Kinsman-Avenger, our God-Man Friend—the Angel-Jehovah form of Him, Who loved us, pitied us, prayed for us, Who was touched with tenderest sympathy for us when we were tempted, Who upheld us with loving gentleness when we were nigh to fall:—“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.”

II.

Christ as the Seed of the Woman.

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”—Gen. iii. 15.

“That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”—Heb. ii. 14.

We closed our last Meditation with those remarkable words of the Apostle : “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever ;”—that is, the same through all past, present, and future duration. As if he would say : “Such as Christ was, under the dispensation given to our fathers, such He is, under the gospel delivered to us in these latter days, such He ever will be, in the uninterrupted successions of the heavenly state.” And as Christ is immutably the same, in Himself, in all ages, so is He always the same in the relations He sustains towards the children of men. From the day of the fall of man until this day, He is always set before us, as the Saviour and Redeemer of the world ;—always the “One Mediator between God and man ;”

always the Author and Finisher of an everlasting righteousness; always the mighty potentate and deliverer, Who should overthrow the kingdom of darkness, and bind its prince in everlasting chains.

It is in this last character, He appears in the first promise of a Saviour ever given to the world. Promise as it is, it is yet wrapped up in the folds of a curse,—a curse on the serpent-angel, who, in order to effect the ruin of our race, had “transformed himself into an angel of light.” Still, from the seed of the woman he had beguiled, it is declared, shall come forth a mighty Conqueror, who, while submitting to apparent defeat, for a season, shall wrest from the adversary the sceptre of his usurped dominion, and lay his honour in the dust: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

With regard to the enmity, here predicted, between Satan and the seed of the woman, it will be seen to arise naturally out of the conflicting aims, which, on the Scripture showing, each is assumed to have in view. They are aims mutually destructive of each other. The object of Satan is to found and maintain an empire of apostate spirits, in open disobedience and revolt from God. The aim of Christ is to set up a kingdom of peace

and righteousness; to give effect to that scheme whereby, having once suffered for sins, “the just for the unjust, He might bring us to God.” The aim of Satan is to destroy man’s immortality; to extend the gloomy reign of spiritual and eternal death; to shiver to atoms the great masterpiece of creative wisdom, and to set this fallen star of paradise, as a trophy, in his own diadem of darkness. The design of Christ was to fill the mansions of heaven with redeemed and rescued spirits; to have the sanctuary of immortality adorned with the victorious fruits and purchase of His cross; to see thousands of believing eyes fixed on the precious ensign of His atonement, that their souls might be saved alive. Such contrary aims and designs, it is manifest, must perpetuate the original enmities of Paradise. The two seeds are severally contending for empire: and neither can have a throne, except on the overthrow and destruction of the other. The Seed of the woman avowed this to be His purpose from all eternity. To this end came He into the world,—to crush, to break, to overturn, to abolish. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”*

With regard to the promise contained in this

* 1 John iii. 8.

sentence upon the serpent, “it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,” it will be observed that the several expressions are figurative, being all taken from the habits of the natural serpent. Thus take the expression: “It shall bruise thy head.” It is allowed that the chief destructive power of the serpent tribe, whether lodged in the tooth, or in the sting, or in the emitted poison, lies in the “head:” so that if this part be effectually crushed, the creature is, for the most part, powerless. The promised bruising of the serpent’s “head,” therefore, evidently corresponds to a promised stripping of Satan of all destroying power; the reducing him to a condition of comparative innocuousness; in fact, the assurance of a raising up to them that fall, and the final “beating down of Satan under their feet.” So with regard to that part of the sentence which relates to Christ. His victory was not to be obtained without grievous assault, and suffering, and hurt. “Thou shalt bruise His heel.” “His heel:” that is, one of the less sensitive parts of the human organization;—a part, in which a wound might be received, without necessarily disabling the sufferer from taking his part in the ordinary duties and avocations of life. The plain import of the prophecy, therefore, is that while a partial wound

should be sustained by "the seed of the woman," the seed of the serpent should be utterly and irretrievably destroyed.

See a fulfilment of the prophecy which has respect to the bruising of the "heel" of Messiah, in the wounds, and scars, and stripes, which Christ was to endure in His lower nature. These began with His life, and only ended with His life. From the first day of our Lord's manifestation, the seed of the serpent began to contrive against Him his deadly plots. First, Herod was set on to destroy the child Jesus in infancy. On commencing His public ministry, the Holy One has to sustain those forty days' fierce encounter in the wilderness. On coming to His own city Nazareth, the maddened populace are stirred up of Satan to "cast Him down headlong" from the brow of the hill.* And, in all the subsequent trials and insults, endured by the Blessed Saviour, we see the work of the subtle serpent of evil, devising new plots and agencies to bruise and distress the human soul of Christ. He moved Herod to mock, and Pilate to scourge, and the priests to revile, and the rabble to shout. He was with the false witnesses who accused, and the apostate disciple who betrayed, with the thief who cast railing in His teeth, and with the heartless

* Luke iv. 29.

soldier who pierced His side. Yes, behind all this machinery of evil did Satan plant himself. Mistaken, short-sighted, utterly suicidal as his policy was, it had its origin in that sentence-promise of Paradise. It was so "written in the bond." Our salvation had been an imperfect thing without it. All that was mortal in the Incarnate One, all that was capable of suffering, all that belonged to the nature which He had assumed, was to be bruised, insulted, dishonoured, shamed. Hunger pinched Him. Thirst distressed Him. Fatigue wearied Him. Pain rent His limbs, and anguish cast down His soul. Oh ! it was indeed the sharpness of the serpent's tooth He felt, when, out of the deep agony of His spirit, He cried out: "Father, save me from this hour." But instantly the thought occurred: "For this cause came I unto this hour."* The Scripture had said that thus it must be: "Thou shalt bruise His heel."

But then, blessed be God, the Scripture had said also: "It shall bruise thy head." And here the triumph of Divine mercy culminates. The two parts of the sentence are found to be correlative: that is to say, it is the very bruising of the heel of Messiah, that leads to the crushing of the head of the serpent. For how stood the case ? The head

* John xii. 27.

of Satan, that wherein his great strength lies, consists in his having the power of death,—a death of which the sting is sin, and the strength is a violated law. But the bruised heel of Christ has rendered both of these powerless. His submission to all the experiences of the Incarnation being a perfect satisfaction to all the demands of the law, and His death upon the cross having provided an infinite propitiation for all sin. Hence, as the Apostle argues in his Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ, by tasting death for every man, has purchased a salvation for every man. By making His righteousness ours, and our sin His, He casts in His lot with us. “For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one :”* and He has made us one, says the Apostle, to this end, “that through death,” that is, His own death, “He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Here, then, we have the prophetic promise,—the sentence-blessing laid out in its complete fulfilment. Satan is allowed to bruise the heel of Messiah, but meanwhile, and in the very act of submitting to this bruising, Christ is Himself bruising Satan in his most vital part. He is casting out the god of this world. He is destroying

* Heb. ii. 11.

him that had the power of death. He is delivering them "who, through fear of death were all their life-time subject unto bondage." He is making death welcome, and the grave a house of victory, and is opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers. True, all this He was to accomplish, and could only accomplish by His own death. "Out of the eater must come forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness." God often confounds human expectations by the agency of contraries. Our joy is the fruit of Christ's tears. Our healing comes from His stripes. Our victory is from the cross, and our light is from the tomb. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel,"* was the faithless language of the two sorrowing disciples; not perceiving that Christ could only conquer death by yielding to him, and could only make a prisoner of the grave, by suffering the grave to imprison Him. Even in his last overt act of triumph, the lifting up of the Son of man, Satan was unconsciously setting the seal to his own utter and everlasting defeat. For then was the Saviour submitting to that which should draw all men unto Him; all eyes to His cross, all hearts to His embrace, all hopes to His sacrifice, all souls to His eternal throne. As His spirit

* Luke xxiv. 21.

passed away, as He gave up the ghost, Satan was seen as lightning to fall from heaven, and the sovereignty of all worlds was given into the hands of the Son of man. The "seed of the woman" had bruised the "serpent's head."

III.

Christ as revealed to Abraham.

“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”—
Gen. xxii. 18.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it,
and was glad.”—John viii. 56.

IT is an accepted belief among commentators, Jewish as well as Christian, that, over and above the visions and sayings which God commanded to be committed to writing, for the instruction of the Church in all ages, separate and supplementary revelations were made to the faithful, of which no record has been made. The promise considered in our last Meditation, might suffice to inspire hope in the coming of some Incarnate Deliverer; yet, unless some oral communication had been made to the first pair to that effect, it is difficult to conceive, how, on the few words contained in the sentence on the serpent, such a hope could be kept alive. So with regard to Christ, as revealed to Abraham. Comparing what we read of the promises made to him, as contained

in the Book of Genesis, with what we read of his faith, in the Scriptures of the New Testament, it is manifest, that, in the Pentateuch, the half is not told us of what Abraham really knew. How or where he obtained all the rest of his knowledge, unless by means of certain unrecorded communications, direct from God Himself, it seems impossible to conjecture. But certain it is, he saw more than the men of his own time saw,—more than any uninspired human intelligence could see,—in those words of promise after the offering up of Isaac: “Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

In like manner, we find passages in the New Testament, which show that, in some way or other, revelations must have been made to Abraham which are not recorded. As, for example, in that memorable conversation which our Lord held with the Jews in the temple. They had been making their boast of Abraham, as far greater than Christ. Whereupon the Holy One made answer,—“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.” In these words, it seems to be implied that Abraham, in his life-time, had prophetic glimpses vouchsafed to him, of the coming of the day of Christ; and that

he realized its accompanying blessings so clearly and vividly, that the very anticipation of the event was to him a source of present joy,—‘Your father Abraham earnestly longed to see My day; and, by the help of his strong faith, he saw it and was glad.’* Of the patriarchs generally, we have the Apostle writing: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.”† And it was especially so, we may be sure, with Abraham. Our Lord knew what Abraham saw better than Moses did;—knew more of what he saw in that mysterious manifestation made to him in the plains of Mamre; more of what he saw when he felt impelled to recognize the priestly claims of Melchizedec; more of what he understood when, beholding a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns, he was led to offer him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. The language of Moses, in referring to these events, is only suggestive. The meaning seems to be half given and half kept back;—the disclosures made, being quite sufficient for the instruction of the Church and of the times, but leaving it probable that Abraham, the person chiefly concerned in the transactions, knew a great deal more. In each of them, he saw some new

* John viii. 56. † Heb. xi. 13.

foreshadowing of the day of Christ,—“saw it, and was glad.”

Yet more conclusive to the possession, by Abraham, of some supplementary knowledge, at least above what appears in the Mosaic record, is the passage, referring to him, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. “By faith,” it is said, “Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead: from whence also he received him in a figure,”*—or, as the word really is, “in a parable.” Of course, it is impossible to say, with certainty, how far the full scope and import of this remarkable transaction were made known to Abraham, or whether any special revelations were made to him as to the typical meaning of its several details. But St. Paul’s expression, that he received his son back “in a parable,” and that, as we know, on the “third day” after he set forth, makes it certain that Abraham must have seen some underlying significance in the whole transaction, which he could not fail to connect with the future of the promised Seed, and the spiritual destinies of mankind. The entire scene, however real and actual in itself,

* Heb. xi. 19.

he had been taught by a heaven-instructed faith to look upon as “allegory,”—a kind of picture-teaching, employed by the Spirit of God, and, according to which, actual facts and occurrences are intended to be representative of something else.

What was that something? Here was a representative sacrifice of an innocent victim; a representative death of the child of promise; a representative rising again on the third day. Is it conceivable that Abraham should be able to put all the parts of this representative scene together? and form them into a picture-prophecy of what should come to pass in Messiah’s day? Hardly can we go so far as that. Nor is it necessary. In the teaching by parable, it is deemed sufficient that, between the thing related and that which it is intended to pre-figure, there should be certain broad features of analogy. And if, therefore, we suppose Abraham to have been divinely taught by what had just taken place, that the redemption he was looking for, would come through some offering up of the promised seed, through some submission to the suffering of death, and through a resurrection to life, to authenticate and perfect the promised redemption,—we see how far in advance of all others he was in his views of

the coming Messiah, and with what a breadth, and reach, and fulness of spiritual emphasis, he would interpret the promise,—“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

Among practical lessons to be learned from these revelations to Abraham, none should be more encouraging than the thought that clearer views of Christ, a firmer hope in Christ, a nearer realizing of the presence of Christ, seem always and especially to be the portion of holy and humble men of heart,—of those who walk most humbly and most closely with God. To them, first, God tells all His heart, and He will “shew them His covenant.” “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do ?”* Abraham the faithful and obedient; Abraham the priest and teacher of his household; Abraham who goes out at My bidding and asks no questions; Abraham the man of effectual fervent prayer, who, to the very verge of an angel’s boldness, interceded for the cities of the plain,—shall I keep back from him anything about the day of Christ, and what it shall be to him of joy, and hope, and bright gladness ?

And so shall it be with us, if only we “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.” We shall see not the day of Christ only, but Christ

* Gen. xviii. 17.

Himself:—a living presence to us; a near reality to us; an interposing screen between our souls and a deserved condemnation; a Mediator, receiving our prayers and offerings into His hands, in order that, sprinkled with His blood, they may come up with acceptance before the throne. Oh! labour and pray we more and more that we may “see Jesus,”—see Him, in our trials succouring us; in our temptations, strengthening us; in our sorrows, comforting us; in our prayers, pleading for us. There is another, and, it may be a far-off, day of Christ, which we, like Abraham, are rejoicing and longing to see. It will be the day when we shall “see the King in His beauty;” when He shall come to be “glorified of His saints;” the day when, with Jacob who waited for His salvation; with the disciples who saw Him taken away in a cloud; with all the expectant righteous who now sleep in Him we shall say: “Lo, this is our God: we have waited for Him and He will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”* “Even so: come Lord Jesus, come quickly.”

* Isa. xxv. 9.

IV.

Christ as manifested to Moses.

“And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.”—Ex. iii. 4-6.

“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me.”—John v. 46.

AMONG foreshadowings of the coming Messiah, we have none more remarkable than the manifestation which was made to Moses. He, like Abraham, was one of those who have shed a lustre on the page of sacred history; who gave a character of greatness to the age in which they lived; and who were permitted to see, bound up with the incidents of their individual life, events of the highest moment to the hopes and happiness of mankind. His connection with the history of Israel will be remembered. During their sojourn

in Egypt, the people were grievously oppressed by Pharaoh. But the more they were afflicted, "the more they multiplied and grew." All the cruel arts and schemes of the Egyptians were over-ruled of God for the furtherance of His own purposes; and especially for the raising up of one mighty personage from among the oppressed people, who should be to them a deliverer from bondage,—a messenger between them and the Infinite Jehovah, as well as being himself a type of that great "Prophet that should come into the world." *

Manifestations of no ordinary power and vividness, we feel would be needed in order to authenticate the mission of one, who should thus present himself before the people, as one directly sent from God. And many such were vouchsafed to Moses: but they all culminate in this vision of the Burning Bush. "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." We never hesitate to class this manifestation among the theophanies of the Old Testament. For in the account of it, the proofs that it was none other than the Eternal Word that conversed with Moses, are of the most

* John vi. 14.

cumulative kind. Within the compass of a few verses, we find, attributed to this Angel of the Lord, names and titles which the Jews held to be absolutely incommunicable,—which, beyond any that language could devise, must be spoken of God, and none else. For the self-same Being, who, in the second verse, is called “the Angel of the Lord,” in the fourth verse is spoken of as “JEHOVAH;” in the sixth verse declares of Himself: “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;” whilst in the fourteenth verse there is attributed to Him that highest and most exclusive of all divine designations; “I AM that I AM.”

On reading such passages, we are almost ready to ask ourselves, are we reading the Pentateuch, or citations from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John? For, in the writings of that apostle, we have a clear distinction made between the hidden God and the manifested God; between Him “Whom no eye hath seen or can see,” and Him, Who, under some subdued and softened aspects of the Godhead, could be seen and has been seen; between Him of Whom it could be said, “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of

Life,"* and Him Who, "in the beginning was with God," and Who, in all the glory of His eternal and self-existent nature, Himself "was God."† "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness :"—God manifest in that burning bush :—manifest and yet not manifest :—for "Moses hid his face, being afraid to look upon God."

But observe next, the mysterious form in which the Eternal Word appeared unto Moses,—that of a fire which does not consume ; a bush, wrapped and enfolded in flame, and yet not a leaf destroyed. "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush : and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Of course, regarding this bush as a type, as the Jews certainly did, whether of Christ or His Church, it is impossible to say what interpretation Moses was taught to put upon its emblematic significance. As applied to Christ, however, some of these typical meanings will be allowed to be very apposite and striking. There is that, for example, which makes the fire and the bush, the strong thing and the weak thing, to be symbolical of the two natures of our Lord,—of His Almighty power and Godhead, enshrined within the frail tabernacle

* 1 John i. 1. † John i. 1.

of our humanity, and yet the tenement itself coming to no harm,—neither the fire nor the bush losing anything of their distinctive properties,—as if designed to be emblematic of “the perfect God and the perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.”

Again, on the supposition that we have before us a type of the union of the two natures in Christ, the burning bush is thought to set forth how the meanness of the Incarnation is but transient and temporary, and will hereafter break forth in all the effulgence of its power and great glory. The vision exhibits to us an example of the most potent and destructive agent in nature, holding back the powers which belong to it,—the flame hurting nothing, and consuming nothing, though dwelling in the heart of the inflammable and crackling thorn. What is this but Jesus holding, in merciful abeyance, all the powers of His omnipotence, while yet not suffering us to forget that such awful powers do belong to Him, and that, towards them that refuse Him and will not obey His Gospel, they will hereafter be put in force? Yes, God hath committed all judgment to the Son, because He would that we should have confidence in His compassions. But we must “kiss the Son lest He be angry.”* In the Book

* Psa. ii. 12.

of the Revelation, Christ appears as a Lamb, as if to inspire us with thoughts of the Saviour's tenderness. Yet, in the same Book, we read with regard to this Lamb, that "the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" * And so in this vision. We behold the undestroyed and uninjured bush. Ourselves, as the leaves upon it,—frail things, perishing things, withering things,—are encompassed by the fires of the divine indignation. Yet, though Jesus suffers them not to hurt us,—for a time, and times, and half a time, will permit the flames to play about us with harmless violence,—He would not that we should forget that the flames are there;—chained up and deprived of their scorching power, during our day of visitation, but, on the expiring of this day, to be let loose to destroy. Our God is always "a consuming fire;" but the flames are withheld that they should not hurt us, because of "the good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush."

Comparing, as far as we may, the knowledge of Messiah, made known to Abraham, with that which was revealed to Moses, we should say that the characteristics of Abraham's revelations had respect to the personal Redeemer. One, through the vista of ages, saw the day of Christ, and the

* Rev. vi. 17.

blessed fruits which should accompany it;—the other, in addition to this, had certain divine intuitions, given to him, as to the deep mystery enfolded in the Incarnation. Hence those words of reproof, thrown out by our Lord against the Jews, for their ignorance about what Moses had said about Him: “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me:”*—wrote of Me, as the Seed of Abraham; wrote of Me, as the royal Priest of Salem; wrote of Me, as the Star that should come out of Jacob; wrote of Me, as the Shiloh of patriarchal hope. And he wrote of Me as being, at once, from above, and from beneath; as the Rock of salvation, as the Manna from heaven, as the Tree of Life, as JEHOVAH the Mighty One, the Angel of the Covenant, the everlasting I AM:—“If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?”†

As then, we would share in Abraham’s rejoicing faith in the blessings of redemption, so pray we for a part in Moses’ sight of the face of our Angel-Redeemer,—dwelling for us in the bush, speaking to us from the thick cloud, communing with us from the mercy-seat, and giving to us Pisgah-views of the heavenly Canaan,—“the goodly mountain and Lebanon.” True, none have risen

* John v. 46.

† John v. 47.

since Moses, whom, as with him, the Lord knew face to face. But there is a faith which is as strong as sight, and as full of comfort too. It is the faith of grateful love; the faith of a found salvation; the faith of the signet ring of peace, sealed on the believer's right hand; the faith of that earnest of the inheritance, which the Spirit puts into the hearts of the sons of God. Such faith is only sight, under another name, and the joy of sight in another form:—"Whom having not seen ye love; in Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."*

* 1 Pet. i. 8.

V.

Christ under Material Types.

“Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”—Col. ii. 17.

“Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.”—Gal. iv. 24.

IN taking, as the subject of an Advent Meditation, Christ under Material Types, it is well that we should have in our minds some definite idea of what a type is. In its more general sense, we know it means a model, pattern, or exemplar:—the resemblance of one thing to another thing. But, in the Scriptural sense, it means something more than resemblance. It is a pre-ordained relation of something under the Old Testament to something, answering to it, under the New,—“type” being the name given to the one, and “anti-type” being the name given to the other. The two together, therefore, form parts of the same general scheme of divine instruction. The type itself may be a person, or an action, or an

institution, or an outward sign; but it must have an intelligible and designed connection with something to come after, to which it bears an external resemblance, and for which, according to the divine purpose, it should serve as a preparation. Hence all true Old Testament types may be considered as acted prophecies; parables to the eye, portions of that larger scheme for the education of mankind, according to which one dispensation becomes a schoolmaster to train us for another, and all the institutions of the Law are made to prepare men's hearts and minds to receive the great realities of the Gospel.

Foremost among these material and visible fore-shadowings of good things to come, we naturally place the institution of SACRIFICE. Of the origin of this institution, except that it must be Divine, it is not possible to speak with certainty. All probability is on the side of many oral communications having been made to our first parents, which have no place in the Mosaic record. We find them making for themselves coats of the skins of animals, which it is not unreasonable to suppose had been slain for purposes of sacrificial worship; whilst, in the offering of Abel, the institution of sacrifice appears as a normal and recognized part of religious duty and service.

Only, however, in the fuller developments of the Jewish ritual, do we get any clear view of that which lies at the root and core of all sacrificial institutions,—the idea of expiation, of atonement, of satisfactory propitiation for the sins which every worshipper knew he had committed. How much or how little the worshippers, under the Law, understood of the moral significance of this emblematic action,—this inflicting of death to deliver from death, this taking of life from the innocent, to get back a forfeited life for the guilty,—it is not possible to say. It is to be supposed, that some persons understood more than others,—were further in advance of their dispensation than others. In every dispensation, that principle of Divine illumination holds true: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.” Patent on the face of that symbolical transaction, by which he offered up his victim on the altar, a pious Jew could at least see this,—that, by reason of sin, his life had become forfeited to the Divine justice; that, in some substitutional or vicarious form, he must see that life actually laid down; and yet that, through faith in this vicarious or emblematic sacrifice, he might have assurance that his own forfeited life should be given back to him, and himself re-instated in the favour and friendship

of God. To see beyond this,—to see in this rite of expiation a prospective reference to the redemptive work of Messiah,—to see in fact the filling up of the grand prophetic outline: “Christ suffering for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,”—this was an insight into the Divine scheme of our salvation, which we may suppose was permitted to few,—being a light held in reserve for the fulness of time, when the shadows of the Law should flee away, and, in the Gospel-light, men should see light.

Among examples of typical sacrifice, the two which would most naturally suggest themselves to our minds, as the standing commemoration of our deliverance from the penalty and power of sin, would be the institution of the Passover, and the offering of the scape-goat. But we should not overlook some other of those material types:—declared to be such, on the authority of the New Testament itself. Such, for instance, is the Manna that fell in the wilderness, regarded as a type of Christ the true Bread of Life. “Of all the miracles wrought by Moses,” says one of the Rabbis, “the feeding of the Israelites with manna was the greatest, and the people were always taught to believe that when Messiah should come, He would authenticate His mission by performing a miracle

of a like or similar kind." And, as we know, our Lord claimed to be accepted on this ground, after the feeding of the five thousand, at the same time explaining the spiritual scope and import of the miracle itself:—"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die."*

Points of resemblance between the type and the antitype, in this example, cluster at every turn. For our profit, it may suffice to dwell upon one, that the manna from heaven, and Christ the bread of heaven, are alike the free gift of God, prompted only by the Divine compassion for man's misery and helplessness. "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven," said our Lord to the Jews, "but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven."† But observe, a gift in either case, and a gift of the Eternal Father too,—now moved with compassion for the bodily necessities of those poor wilderness wanderers, and now pitying dead and starving souls, hungering for the bread of life. Wherefore, let this thought be with us constantly, that every good thing and every perfect thing comes down to us as that manna came. God's dear Son is a gift. Eternal life is a

* John vi. 48-50.

† John vi. 32.

gift. Repentance unto salvation is a gift. Enlightening and converting grace is a gift. Human efforts could no more avail to procure these things, than the sowing of coriander seed could produce a harvest of manna. All good must come to us direct from God's hand to our hand. Wine and milk; grace and glory; bread from heaven or water from the rock,—these must be ours, if they are ours, on those terms of grateful acknowledgment,—“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”*

Passing over many other typical foreshadowings of Christ,—such as the tree of life in Paradise; the pillar of fire and cloud; the rainbow in its blended glories; the tabernacle with its mystic furniture, I note only in conclusion, that most eloquent and impressive of material types,—the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. In this is embodied the great Gospel principle, which, though underlying all the typical institutions of the Old Testament, is here brought out with emphatic prominence,—the principle, I mean, that Christ is ours, that healing is ours, that salvation is ours, only on the supposition that there is on our part the putting forth of a definite act of faith in Him.† With regard to the lifting up by Moses

* 2 Cor. ix. 15. † John iii. 14, 15.

of this serpent in the wilderness, there is no doubt that it was looked upon by the people as a symbol only, and not at all as anything which possessed any magical or talismanic charm of its own. Their looking at it was a commanded act of faith in a certain outward and visible sign; but the healing effect they acknowledged to be a result of the mighty power of God. The theology of the action is well expressed in the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom:—"The serpent was a sign of salvation to put them in remembrance of the commandment of Thy law: for he that turned himself to it was not saved by the thing he saw, but by Thee that art the Saviour of all."*

And thus it is seen how, in this essential particular of salvation by faith alone, the Old Testament and the New are agreed. The eyes of saints under both dispensations meet in that uplifted symbol of sacrifice:—theirs fixed upon the shadow; ours upon the substance. With regard to us, we know, as a matter of fact, that a man is holier, happier, purer both in heart and life, the more his entire Christian course takes the form of "looking unto Jesus,"—looking to His life for an example, looking to His word for a guide, looking to His cross for a

* Book of Wisdom.

righteousness, looking to His ascension throne for all those gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are assured and sealed as the sons of God. Whether to the Church in the wilderness, or to the Church under the Gospel, Christ crucified is the attracting centre of all hope, all quickening, all strength. He draws all eyes to His cross. He draws all hearts to His footstool. He draws all kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, to put themselves under the shadow of His throne. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."* "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."†

* Isa. xlvi. 22. † John xii. 32.

VI.

Christ dispelling the World's Darkness.

“Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.”—Luke i. 78.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”—2 Cor. iv. 6.

By two pairs of letters we part off the entire history of our race. Every thing is either “before Christ,” or, “in the year of Christ.” Changes in legislation, dynasty, invention, art, we note them all as belonging to one side or the other of this great historic demarcation,—the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Neither are we to consider this as a mere arbitrary division for the convenience of historians or compilers of statistics. The coming of Christ marked a new era of human thought; inaugurated a new reign of light over darkness, of truth over error, of a reasonable service over superstition, and formality, and the worship of an unknown God. It was the new birth of humanity; the glorious sunrise of Revelation, emerging from four centuries of thick cloud. Shall not all the

isles welcome such an Advent: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." *

Christ then, as dispelling the world's darkness, is always a welcome Advent thought. It was a darkness which might be felt. Men neither knew God, nor knew themselves. Nor was this darkness a mere blank and inoperative thing. It was an oppressive burden upon the spirit; a dark spell at work upon the understanding and conscience; an active influence, blinding their eyes, and applied by the powers of darkness, "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Hence it was that even such secondary sources of religious knowledge as were accessible to the heathen world were of no avail. Their eyes were holden by the god of this world, so that seeing they saw not. Nature, eloquent in her testimonies to the eternal power and godhead, could not be heard. Providence, in its outspread pictures of an intelligent and all-ruling Mind, was not understood. The "foolish heart was darkened." The light of reason was gone. Conscience had laid by its enfeebled functions, and the whole heathen world seemed given over to "a reprobate mind."

* Isa. ix. 1.

And this suggests another aspect of Christ, as “dispelling the world's darkness:” namely, the special topics on which His Advent was designed to throw its own peculiar light. Of these, the first of course would be that truth of all truths, “The Lord our God is one Lord,”—at once making a clean sweep of all those “gods many and lords many,” which, in every age, has been the fond invention of the uninstructed and darkened mind. But, looking at peoples, who had attained to a much higher intellectual and religious level than the worshippers of idolatry—nations, like the Jews, and those who had caught gleams of revealed truth from them,—we are obliged to include them also in this category of Zacharias, as peoples “sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death.” For even while admitting the unity of the godhead, and the expectation of a world to come, they had low thoughts of sin; low thoughts of a righteous administration; low thoughts of the ransom to be paid for transgression; low thoughts of the change which must come over man's nature and man's heart, before he could be fitted for the higher and purer fellowships of heaven. As much, therefore, as the heathen themselves, did they need “the day-spring from on high to guide their feet into the way of peace.” And they rejoiced in its

coming, as unfolding to them the great mystery of man's redemption ; showing to them the necessity of a Divine Mediator, stooping to the deep burden of man's transgression, and offering Himself as a ransom for a fallen world. In all this, they saw not "the tender mercy of our God" only, but also His infinite rectitude and purity, in that, rather than His "justice should be stained, would stain the cross,"—would spare offending man, even though in order thereto, He would not spare His only Son.

Hence I observe, further, that it is by means of this "day-spring from on high which hath visited us," that we come to know God in the freeness of His grace, and the abounding of His compassions towards the children of men. The two outstanding characteristics of the Divine nature on which the beloved Apostle most frequently insists, as expressed in his own terse and emphatic sentences are, "God is light," and "God is love." And it was by the coming of the "day-spring from on high," that this two-fold view of the divine character was made manifest. Seen in gospel light, all creation wears a lovelier aspect. In spite of the thorns and thistles which sin has introduced—the whole creation groaning with the burden of the first malediction—the world is still bright with its Maker's reconciled and forgiving smile. In Christ,

this world is seen as the object of the Father's love, the consecrated home of the Son's humanity, the grand theatre of the Divine Spirit's influences, whereby this sin-soiled and sin-stained materialism may develop into "the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." Thus the world is hardly like the same world, since "the day-spring from on high" hath visited it. The blight is taken away. The eye of faith can see more brightness in the stars above, more beauty in the flowers of the field. The ocean, in its ceaseless flow, bears the glad tidings of redemption to every shore; and the sound of the loud thunder dies not, without proclaiming, in subdued and softened accents, "God is love." Yes, in the light of the day-spring, nature, providence, grace, all blend in consentaneous harmony—their testimony one, their teaching one, all their purposes and appointments meeting in one,—to impress mankind with a persuasion of that everlasting truth, that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

Once more, it is in the visiting of "the day-spring from on high," that we are permitted to see how all the plans and purposes of God, in the redemp-

* John iii. 16.

tion of the world, are connected with a fuller manifestation of His own glory. So the Apostle teaches: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* "In the face of Jesus Christ," for therein, that is, in His life, and sacrifice, and finished work—do we see how all the Divine attributes conspire and co-operate together, each having its separate part to sustain in the salvation of man; mercy refusing to bestow a pardon, except in harmony with truth, and the peace of justification never found, except in holy and loving embrace with the "Lord our righteousness."

Again, only "in the face of Jesus Christ" can the glory of God be vindicated in Providence. No doubt, we see many things take place in the world, which we are at a loss to account for,—why they are permitted or why they are done. But we must remember that, at present, it is only the "day-spring" which hath visited us; we have not shining upon us as yet the full-orbed glory of the "Sun of righteousness." That is a glory which is still to be revealed. But still the clue is given us. And it is a clue which both teaches duty and

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

inspires trust. The principles of moral government, unfolded in the Gospel, teach us how to work and wait: to do God's bidding, and then to tarry for God's time." "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."* In any work undertaken for God, whether for our own souls, or for the souls of others, we must accustom ourselves to walk by faith and not by sight. Love and trust will make light, as we go on: whilst as to difficulties, enmities, oppositions, fears,—the word is pledged to us that, before Zerubbabel, these great mountains shall become a plain. The breath of the Mediator, we are told, is a flaming fire, and by it He will consume all His enemies and ours: "And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."†

Wherefore, let us take as a comforting Advent lesson, that since Christ the day-spring from on high hath visited us, it must be ours to walk in His light: in the light of His Word to guide, in the light of His promise to cheer, in the light of His example to follow, in the light of His approving countenance to animate, and sustain, and bless. As to any sufferings we may have, in this present time, the Apostle says they "are not worthy to be

* John xiii. 7. † Isa. i. 31.

compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* True, the first Advent of Christ has told us much: but how much more will His second Advent tell us; as to why we were so let and hindered; why we were cast down with fear; why we were so often left alone without light, and without help, and with all the powers of evil, as it were, arrayed against us.

And then shall we see how every trial that was sent to us, every temptation that was appointed for us, every 'seeming hindrance to our soul's growth in grace, and every dark cloud which, for a season, obscured our hopes of glory, were only parts of that same "tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

* Rom. viii. 18.

VII.

Christ the expected Prophet.

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”—John vi. 14.

“And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son : hear Him.”—Luke ix. 35.

“Him hath God the Father sealed.”—John vi. 27.

CHRIST the expected Prophet, is the subject proposed for the present Meditation. But as, in the case of any one laying claim to such an office, whether under the Law or under the Gospel, everything turned upon the seal and authentication of His message, the Evangelist is careful to show how abundantly Jesus of Nazareth could abide this test. On the strength of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, the multitude, with one consent, had avouched Him to be the long looked-for Prophet. But mere outbursts of popular feeling are not things to be trusted. There must be attestations to His divine mission direct from

above. All the elements, put out of course, must bear witness. Notable fulfilments of ancient prophecy must bear witness. Voices from the excellent glory, over the Jordan, and on the Mount, must bear witness. No room for doubt shall there be, in the minds of the people, whether Jesus of Nazareth was He that should come, or whether they were to look for another;—“For Him hath God the Father sealed.”

In considering some of these confirmatory testimonies, we give a first place to the witness of miracle. As an attestation, we all acknowledge the power of this. Nicodemus gave expression to a sentiment, shared in universally, when he said: ‘Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles, that Thou doest, except God be with him.’* What place could there be for doubt, as to His title to be so considered, when a few barley loaves were made to satisfy the hunger of thousands; when death and the grave were no longer able to hold their prisoners in captivity; when the sea in its raging wildness, at the voice of a Man, was hushed into a great calm; when the water, blushing at the presence of the Lord of all, was turned into wine; and when the fig-tree, on hearing its Maker’s voice,

* John iii. 2.

perished and withered away. Of such miracles the record has been preserved, and this Evangelist has told us the reason why, saying :—“ And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book : but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ,—that Jesus is the Son of God,”*—that Jesus is that Prophet that should come into the world.

But another attesting seal to the claims of Christ as the expected Prophet, came in the more direct form of audible voices from heaven. On three occasions, as we know, were these voices heard, and they are all to be regarded as seals to the Saviour’s Divine mission. But the voice which is more directly connected with our Lord’s designation to the office of Prophet, is that which was heard on the Mount of Transfiguration. Because it was there, in the midst of sublime accompaniments which mortal eyes were afraid to look upon, and while He was holding discourse with the glorified spirits of the illustrious dead, that the whole world was commanded to give Him audience: “ And it came to pass while He yet spake, behold, a bright cloud over-shadowed them : and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said,

* John xx. 30, 31.

‘This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.’” *

To the disciples, hardly could any seal of divine authentication have been more assuring than this; as being so much in accord with their most sacred traditions. The designation of prophets to their high office, under the Old Testament, was often attended by circumstances peculiarly impressive and sublime. Moses received his commission from the midst of the burning but unconsumed bush. Isaiah was separated to the work, by a vision of the Holy One in His temple, encircled by veiled and adoring seraphim. Ezekiel received his anointing in the midst of the whirlwind, and the cloud, and the enfolding brightness,—the wheels of the Divine chariot rolling, and the living creatures letting down their wings. But the awful splendour of the Transfiguration rises above these scenes: and, as a testimony to the Divine mission of the Prophet of Nazareth, must have come with all the force of demonstration. Already had His wonderful works borne witness to Him. Already had the voices of their ancient prophets concerning Him been verified, to the minutest particulars, in His life and work. But now, with their own eyes, they had seen Him put on, for an instant, as much

* Matt. xvii. 5.

as mortal faculties could bear, of the image of the Infinite and Invisible God; while a voice from the uncreated glory attested that His witness was true. And by the three privileged disciples who were present, at that scene especially, the memory of it would be treasured up as a living and lasting thing. It made delusion or deception, as to their Master's heavenly mission, impossible. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables," said Peter many years afterwards, "when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His Majesty, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.' And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount."* What need we any further witnesses that this is indeed the Prophet of the ages?

One other seal to the prophetic mission of our Lord can it be necessary to insist upon, namely, the seal of results; the seal of acceptance, and favour, which seemed to accompany the very words which He spake. It is witnessed of Him that "His word was with power."† It was evident that there was a divinely accompanying energy, in

* 2 Pet. i. 16-18.

† Luke iv. 32.

His exhortations, which compelled attention to the Teacher, even when the hearers had no sympathy with the things He taught. Still, new and startling as were many of His doctrines, people went on listening to them. The very multitudes to whom the words of the Evangelist were spoken, had been following Him about for three days;—stinting themselves of necessary food, that they might hear His words;—the unspoken thought passing from one to another: “Never man spake like this Man.”*

How do we account for this strange spell on the minds of thousands of people at the same time? Why that they were under a Divine influence. It was the transfixing power of God-head in Him that spake to them; the entrance into the soul of the Word Incarnate; the riveting conviction, that they were listening to a voice from the throne. This, we are told, was the reason why the sermon on the mount excited such astonishment:—“for He taught them as One having authority and not as the scribes.”† “Having authority:”—there was a divine and thrilling efficacy in His discourses, which put Him on a different level from all human prophets, even the greatest among them. Jonah was a great

* John vii. 46. † Matt. vii. 29.

preacher. His voice pealed through the streets of Nineveh, and made all its palaces tremble. But "behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Solomon was a teacher of mighty fame. His proverbs are a matchless product of inspired wisdom, for all countries, and for all time. But "behold, a greater than Solomon is here." "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world."

VIII.

Christ a Priest after the Order of Melchizedec.

“For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made-like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.”—Heb. vii. 1-8.

“The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”—Psa. cx. 4.

EMINENT, among personal types of Christ, as this Melchizedec was, historically very little is known about him. His appearance, on the stage of Old Testament history, is singularly mysterious and flitting. He is no sooner come, than he is gone again. He crosses our path in the Mosaic record. Nine hundred years after, he is made mention of, prophetically, in the Book of Psalms: and then a thousand years later, we have him made the subject of an important scriptural argument in the Epistle

to the Hebrews. Our only historical notices of him are to be obtained from the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. There we learn that Abraham, on returning from the slaughter of the confederate kings, rested for a time, with his forces, in the valley of Shaveh or Salem, where he was hospitably entertained by Melchizedec, the prince of the country, who also was "a priest of the most high God."* Still, brief as the narrative is, it contains enough to show how closely Melchizedec is a type of Christ, and how, both in his acts and titles, he sustains the eminence of His typical character. Even the little incident, noticed in the chapter, of the prince bringing out "bread and wine," for the refreshment of Abraham and his followers, after the toils of conflict,—is one which we can hardly suppose to be without its typical significance. For who can but think of Him, Who, to souls, weary with life's burden and strife, brings out bread and wine,—offering to believing hearts the blessed Sacrament of His passion; that so, with the sacred memorials of His body broken and His blood shed, fresh upon them,—His people might go on their way rejoicing.

Still more typical of the Redeemer's royalty, are the titles here given to Melchizedec, in the

* Gen. xiv. 18.

Epistle to the Hebrews,—“first, being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.” These titles, as applied to the first Melchizedec, may mean no more than that, in the methods of his rule, he had earned for himself the reputation of being a scrupulously upright and peace-loving prince: that he stood high among neighbouring powers, for the amicable relations which he maintained with the different border-states, and for the strict equity and righteousness which marked his government at home.

But, to us, this title is eminently characteristic of Messiah’s spiritual royalty. We remember how it is said of the King to be raised up unto the house of David: “This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”* And we feel that we must have this attribute in our Melchizedec. For if He cannot satisfy every demand of a violated law, if He cannot meet all the conditions of unsullied holiness, if He cannot discharge every claim which Heaven may have against us by His all perfect and unsinning obedience, His intervention on our behalf cannot comfort and cannot save. To be called King of mercy, King of glory, King of

* Jer. xxiii. 6.

might, is not sufficient for Him who is to undertake for us. Our first need is that He be a “King of **RIGHTEOUSNESS**.”

“And after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.” This also describes a part of our indebtedness to Him, Who is exalted to be to us a Prince and a Saviour. Our first need, a righteousness, a plea, a full and perfect propitiation, is secured. This done, however, the guilt removed, the curse done away, the sword of heaven sheathed, the face of the Eternal Father turned kindly towards us, all the enmities of our carnal nature broken down and destroyed, we thenceforth attain to a sense of inward tranquillity. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.”* “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you.”† The two things always go together in the predictions of Messiah’s kingdom: “In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.”† “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.”§

Some other features of this parallelism may be noted. It is observed that on meeting Abraham, returning from the slaughter of the kings,

* Rom. v. 1. † John xiv. 27. § Psa. lxxii. 7.

§ Isa. xxxii. 17.

Melchizedec “blessed him.” This is a work which is specially characteristic of the true Melchizedec. Benediction seems never to have been off the lips of Christ. With promises of blessing, He opened His sermon on the mount. With hands of blessing He called little children to His embrace. With the uplifted voice of blessing, He was borne away on the Ascension cloud: and when, as with these followers of Abraham, He shall come to meet us after our return from the battle of life,—after victories obtained, through His grace, over all the potentates and powers of evil,—He will bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,—saying: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*

The parallelism might be pursued further in regard to the mysterious origin of this Melchizedec, as being a man who, as far as appears from any preserved records, was without a parentage, without a history, without a date to mark either his beginning of life, or his end of days,—being, in this respect, made like unto the Son of God;—“for who shall declare His generation?”† or how should perishing records tell of Him “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”?‡

* Matt. xxv. 34.

† Isa. liii. 8.

‡ Mic. v. 2.

Leaving this however, it must suffice to touch upon that last point of resemblance, mentioned by the Apostle, that this Melchizedec “abideth a priest continually.” By this is meant that the priesthood of Melchizedec was an intransmissible priesthood: that he had no successor in his office: that a kind of typical perpetuity attached to his ministrations, seeing that there is no mention in Scripture, of the time when they ceased.

And in all this, argues the Apostle, he is a fit representative of the true Melchizedec, Who does abide for ever; Who has an unchangeable priesthood; Who in all the might, and prevalence, and sovereignty of an unshared mediation, “ever liveth to make intercession for us.” He is a “priest for ever:” and a king for ever: and an intercessor for ever; with none second to Him and none like; with none to co-operate and none to come after; with no interruption and no pause. One is our High Priest, and His name one. There is the same blood to cleanse there always was; the same voice to plead there always was; the same emblem of sacrifice is ever in the midst of the throne, and the same censer is still in the hands of the Holy One, to receive the prayers of all saints: “He abideth a priest continually.”

“Consider then, brethren, the Apostle and High

Priest of our profession,"* the risen, the reigning, the royal Melchizedec. Consider Him in the dignity of His nature; in the perfection of His sacrifice; in the blended strength of His offices; in the tenderness of His human sympathies, as well as in the mightiness of His pleadings before the everlasting throne. The proper scope and tendency of our leading Church commemorations is to show that the whole mediatorial life of our Lord, whether in earth or in heaven, ought to assure our hearts before God. The cross and the sceptre, the grave and the throne, the fainting and the Almightiness, all conspire to enhance our confidence in our exalted King-priest. We feel that we have a royal and merciful High Priest over the house of God:—that He is mighty Who pleads, that He is merciful Who rules, that if the Priest's heart is tender, the King's hand is strong; and that in the exercise of these powers for His people, and in the bringing of many sons unto glory, He is bringing to pass the saying that is written: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec."

* Heb. iii. 1.

IX.

Christ's Victories foreshadowed in Zerubbabel.

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”—*Zec. iv. 7.*

“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.”—*Isa. xli. 14, 15.*

ZERUBBABEL is mentioned in both our Gospel genealogies, as descended of the royal house of David. He was one of the princes of the captivity; and, while living at Babylon, was probably in the king's service. On the issuing of Cyrus's decree for the return of the captives to their own land, Zerubbabel immediately availed himself of it, and placed himself at the head of those of his countrymen, “whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in

Jerusalem." * In this work, however, the builders encountered great opposition. Difficulties, of mountain size and strength, seem to be across their path. And their faith failed them. They forgot that, in the Divine orderings, great results are mainly accomplished by invisible and spiritual agencies. God has His own way of levelling obstacles, and casting down oppositions, and turning hearts. "Then answered the angel, This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." †

In all this we have an Advent parable. And that which it seems to set forth is, that the building up of the great spiritual temple of Christ's kingdom,—which, whether in the world at large, or in the heart of man, has to encounter many difficulties,—will yet, by the strength of one mighty Arm, go on and prosper, until, with exultant shoutings, the work is finished, to remain an everlasting monument of the power of the grace of God.

Filling up this spiritual outline, we are led to see, in this wasted temple at Jerusalem, a picture of our nature, in its lapsed and lost estate, yet having the promise of perfect restoration, and of

* Ezra i. 5.

† Zech. iv. 6.

being so re-habilitated, as to become once more a temple of the living God. The image of man, as a temple or tabernacle, we know to be of frequent recurrence in Scripture. Speaking of His own body, we have our Lord saying: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* And St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: "Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"† But what is the history of this temple? Why that, by reason of sin having entered into it, and defiled it, all its glory and honour departed from it. From that moment, God would neither dwell in it, nor walk in it. The only fire which burned on its altars, was "strange fire." The incense which went up from it, was the incense of dread and fear. Nothing remained to indicate the presence of its Divine inhabitant. The life of God, in man's soul, became all but extinct: and the once living temple was laid as waste and desolate, as that which the armies of Nebuchadnezzar had pillaged and destroyed.

But then, as with that material structure, a promise had gone forth, that there should be a restoration. A mighty Zerubbabel should arise, who, bearing down all barriers and resistances,

* John ii. 19. † 1 Cor. iii. 16.

should build up a spiritual temple, wherein God may dwell. We might have feared, as those disheartened captives felt, that no power could restore that over-thrown and forsaken fabric; that it could never again be filled with a Divine presence. But let us fear not. God has made large provision for restoring lost souls. The Word, the eternal power of God, has become flesh, and tabernacled among us; causing that, by the inhabitation of His Spirit, the “glory of the latter house” should be greater than the glory of the former,—the glory of a temple of the Holy Ghost exceeding the glory of the living temple of Paradise. Yes, the word had gone forth: “I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, and will build again the ruins thereof, and will set it up.”* The tabernacle of God must once more be with men. Made temples of God anew, through the inhabitation of the Spirit, their souls become impregnated with a living breath. By degrees, the restored fabric is seen to rise up in all the majesty of its spiritual proportions, until the Spirit brings forth the head-stone with shoutings, saying, “Grace, grace unto it.”

Observe another lesson of this prophetic parable, namely that, in the building up of this spiritual

* Acts xv. 16.

temple, whether in the world at large, or in the heart of the believer, many difficulties are to be looked for, and obstacles which no power of our own will suffice to overthrow:—"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."

In the setting up of the temple of Christ's kingdom in the world, the first builders, as we know, were met by fierce opposition and difficulty. They were opposed by the great mountain of unbelief,—the offended pride of the Jewish rulers and people being unable to see how the rod of strength was to come forth out of the stem of Jesse, or the Branch of righteousness to come out of his roots. Here was One, claiming to be Messiah the Prince, Who was Himself nothing but "a root out of a dry ground; the impoverished descendant of an impoverished family;" One having "no form or comeliness" to recommend Him,—being the poor representative of faded royalty, forgotten greatness, and an almost extinguished name. How was such an one to become the founder of a mighty empire? "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?"* was the faithless question of thousands. Good from Nazareth, glory from shame, a majestic temple from a heap of stones,

* Mark vi. 3.

the kingdom of the Branch sprouting up from a dry and shrivelled root,—how can such things be? As soon expect a “great mountain” to be removed, and become a level “plain.”

Nor less against the calculations of human likelihood, was the setting up of Christ’s kingdom, on account of the opposition of the whole heathen world. Never more than at the time of our Lord’s coming, was that prophecy fulfilled of the Jews, that they should be despised and outcast by all peoples; left to wander, as a proverb and a bye-word, over the face of the earth. How unlikely that they who stood high among the nations, would accept, from such a down-trodden race, a king to reign over them: or that the most wise and learned of the age would admit the claims of an unknown Galilean peasant, to be acknowledged as the great Prophet and instructor of mankind. Yet this “mountain” was laid low too. “Before Zerubbabel” it became “a plain.” The triumphs of the Gospel, in the first ages, in the face of such stupendous obstacles, constitute a unique fact in the history of nations. Gibbon was never more at fault, than when he made his celebrated attempt to solve this historic problem, by a reference to human causes and agencies. For the real solution of the problem is to be found only in this prophecy

of Zechariah. The work prospered, the kingdom of Christ was set up, as Zerubbabel was informed it should be set up, not by means of human appliances, but in spite of them :—not by the skill and energy of the builders, but by the direct putting forth of the power of the Holy Ghost. “This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” “Who art thou, O great mountain? ‘Before Zerubbabel,’ and the Almighty Spirit working in Zerubbabel, thou shalt become a plain.”*

In like manner, and as another lesson to be learned from this Advent parable, we are taught that whatever difficulties may be encountered in re-building the spiritual temple in the heart of the believer, they shall assuredly be overcome, to the honour of our Zerubbabel, and to the praise of the glory of His grace. He who begins will also make an end. Hindrances of mountain formidableness and mountain strength, may seem to retard the work, but all shall yield to the power of the Spirit of God :—“He shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

Thus, what difficulties do we experience, in building up the temple of our soul's inner life,

* Zech. iv. 7.

from the prevalence of unbelief, from the buffettings of temptation, from the evil of our own hearts, from fears, and doubts, and all the saddening influences of gloomy and desponding thoughts. Often, for months together, we may have to bewail great deadness of spiritual feeling, and want of love for God and His service, and loss of comfortable experiences in prayer, and no strength to lay hold on the word and promises, until the entire work of the soul seems at a stand.

And yet, formidable as these difficulties are to look upon,—even, as if in front of the home we are journeying to, there rose up before us a great mountain, yet, before Zerubbabel, this mountain shall become a plain:—is already dwarfing into a plain, even while, with sorrow and fearfulness of heart, we are looking on its darkening shadow. Indeed the shadow is no shadow, so long as we are mourning over it. At least it is shadow, and nothing else. There is no real mountain in the way, so long as we are pressing onward. Temples require time to build, and adversaries may require a prolonged fight to overcome. But the promise, assured to us by the word and the oath, by the pledge and the covenant, is, that all obstacles shall disappear before the presence of Zerubbabel. Only let us labour on,

and trust; build on, and be patient; looking upwards, and working upwards,—layer upon layer and stone upon stone, in full assurance that the Lord of the temple will see to the completion of His own work, and that in His own good time “He will bring forth the head-stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

X.

Christ the Foundation Stone.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”—*Isa. xxviii. 16.*

“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”—*Psa. cxviii. 22.*

THE imagery of the passage in Isaiah is, no doubt, taken from the substructure of Solomon’s temple, the preservation of which to this day, is one of our standing historic miracles. The foundation laid in Zion seems to be indestructible. The fabric itself has sustained demolitions many and various, and no less destructive of its original character have been the renovations and restorations of the buildings; but the foundations, with their gigantic walls, remain, in all the strength of their undestroyed prophetic life: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone.”

Contemplate some aspects of the scheme of our redemption, as they appear to be suggested by this passage. .

The first is that the scheme itself has God for its originating and devising Author: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation,” saith the Lord God. We accept, with much thankfulness, those passages of Scripture which remind us that the plan of our salvation is of God, and not of us: that the pattern of that spiritual temple of which Christ is the chief corner-stone, was formed in the everlasting Mind, before the world was. To us, and with the limited views we are able to take of the Divine dealings, it might, at first, appear that the remedy for man’s misery came not till after his fall. But in this we should greatly err. The Lamb of God was “slain from the foundation of the world.”* The sinner’s refuge was ready, or ever the voice of his sin had cried unto God from the ground. Before flower had bloomed, or dew had fallen, or sun had shone, or sea had roared, the love of the Eternal heart had determined what it would do,—had committed itself to a plan of mercy and forgiveness, which, except in the case of the unbelieving and impenitent, could never fail. No prayer of man shall move God to this provision of mercy. No assistance from man shall help Him in it. “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone.”

* Rev. xiii. 8.

The next aspect of the redemptive scheme, suggested by the image of Isaiah, is its stability and certainty, as resting upon the immutability and permanence of the Divine administration. Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, "a stone." We know there are some foundations which are not of stone. Our Lord Himself described the case of a man who "built his house on the sand." He meant it as the type of the hypocrite's hope, which, though during for a little while, would totter with the heaving earth, and be swept away with the in-rushing tide. But here was a foundation of enduring solidity and firmness. This stone in Zion would stand for all time. And it has stood. Age after age has it borne the superstructure of good men's hopes. And though the Church, built upon it, has shaken sometimes, when storms have swept around it, and floods have descended upon it, yet the stone is as solid now, as unmovable and unshaken now, as in the day when Noah, Daniel, and Job first cast upon it the burden of their sins, and built upon it their sure hope of heaven. It was stone, tried stone, indestructible foundation stone. Other stones moulder under the all-consuming tooth of time. The stately columns of Babylon and Nineveh, have paid their appointed tribute of decay; and even the stern iron cliffs

which gird round our island home have yielded to the abrasures and encroachments of the tide. But the stone laid in Zion, Christ the rock of ages, is from everlasting to everlasting. "Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."*

Stability and certainty, then, these are the great constituents of the Christian's hope. Nothing can move him from it. Truth is permanent. The Covenant of redemption is unchanging. The essential principles of the Divine administration, in other words, the terms upon which alone God does, or can pardon sinners, can no more change than the Eternal God Himself can change. We cannot imagine the possibility of an atonement, available in one age, and not available in another; of a dependence for sinners, which was rock yesterday, proving nothing but treacherous and sliding sand today. No: "the foundation of the Lord standeth sure." We cannot lightly esteem "the Rock of our salvation." There is one Lord, and His name one: one foundation, and its strength one: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone,—a tried stone."

Another comforting aspect of redemption, brought out in this passage, is its completeness, as resting upon the proved qualifications of a Personal

* Heb. i. 12.

Redeemer: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone,—a tried stone."

The expression may be taken in a double sense. Thus Christ is a tried stone, in the sense of one who has been proved adequate to bear the weight laid upon Him by all the saints of all time; by the countless hosts of the redeemed who stand before the throne, and who, building upon Him, found Him "mighty to save." It is the testimony of the great cloud of witnesses, as they recite the victories of faith; it is the voice of the army of martyrs, whose souls repose under the altar; it is the song of the myriad harpers, as with firm and unfaltering tread they stand upon the crystal sea,—the Foundation which God laid in Zion is a tried stone. We tried Him in darkness; tried Him in danger; tried Him in distress; tried Him as we passed through the deep waters; tried Him in the midst of the scorching flame. But He never failed us. We have tried Him ourselves. He is a "tried stone."

Again, Christ may be called a tried stone, as He was tried in Himself: as He was made to have experience of all those discouragements and hardships, whereby He was fitted to become both a sympathizer with us in our infirmities, and an ensample to us of godly life. In the days of His flesh, He was tempted and tried "in all points like

as we are," and, in many points, far more than we are. Oh! was ever sorrow like His sorrow, or were ever trials like His trials! How was His love tried, when He was rejected by those whom He had come to save. How was His patience tried, when neither His words nor His works could cure the people of their unbelief. How was His steadfastness tried, when, for forty days and forty nights, He endured the privations of sickening hunger, and the assaults of a hated foe. How was His meekness tried, when He gave His back to the scourge; when He bowed His shoulder to the cross; when He was forsaken of His friends; when He was mocked and reviled by His foes; when under the exhausted powers of the Incarnation, He felt as if He were forsaken of God Himself. Truly if He were to "learn obedience by the things that He suffered," the stone in Zion was a "tried stone."

One other attribute of this stone laid in Zion, has to be noticed: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone." We have still before us the image of a temple. And therefore, by the term corner-stone, in this connection, we should understand that which gives to a fabric the strength of consolidation or cohesion. The thought is expanded in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where we read of the

Church, that it is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.”* The whole building is compacted by that which every living stone sup- plieth, but yet that which compacts and solidifies all things is Christ the “corner-stone.”

‘The Corner-stone,’ say rather, after our prophet, the “precious Corner-stone.” For precious He assuredly is, ever has been, and ever will be. Inquire of the saints of old time. Was He not precious to Job, believing in his kinsman-redeemer? precious to Abraham, rejoicing by faith in the day of his illustrious seed? precious to Jacob, longing for salvation till Shiloh come? Was He not precious to David, as the true Melchizedec? to Daniel as “the Ancient of Days?” to Isaiah, as “the plant of renown?” to Jeremiah proclaiming His glorious name to all the listening isles, “This is the name whereby He shall be called, The LORD JEHOVAH our Righteousness”? And shall He be less precious to believers now? Hear what is said by St. Peter, after quoting the words of Isaiah: “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”† And He is precious to the believer every way;

* Eph. ii. 20. 21. † 1 Pet. ii. 7.

precious for the dignity of His nature, precious for the sufficiency of His atonement, precious for the fulness of His grace, precious for the abundings of His love. His word is precious, for it guides us. His sacraments are precious, for they comfort us. His name is precious, for it gives us access to His Father's throne. His blood is precious, for it both cleanses from all sin, and, by its sanctifying and all covering power, redeems us as kings and priests unto God. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."

XI.

Christ in His two-fold nature disclosed to Isaiah.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”—Isa. ix. 6.

“Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”—Isa. vii. 14.

“Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?”* was the question put by the angel of the Lord to Manoah, and, taken in connection with the two passages from Isaiah at the head of this Meditation, may serve to account for the very general belief, among Jewish doctors, that some deep mystery connected with the nature of the coming Messiah was concealed under that saying of the prophet: “The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth.”† In other words a

Margin “Wonderful” (Judges xiii. 18). † Jer. xxxi. 22.

“mystery”—concreted, by some of these writers, into the form of an expectation that their Messiah, while, in all essential particulars made partaker of a flesh and blood nature, would, in some way they knew not of, be partaker of preternatural or superhuman endowments.

Of prophecies of our Lord’s proper humanity, however, it is not needful to cite examples. It was clearly foretold in the promise of deliverance, through the seed of the woman, given to our first parents. The succeeding promises made to Abraham and the fathers, all proceed upon the supposition that the Christ Who was to come, should be true and very man; not a created being or angel; but “born of a woman,” and, as a woman’s offspring, first appearing among men. “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” it was said to Abraham: “Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne,”* it was said to David. “And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest,”† it is said in Isaiah, all passages shewing that the prophet did but echo the deeply cherished sentiment of all preceding generations when, as of an event already fulfilled, he prophesied,—“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”

* Psa. cxxii. 11.

† Isa. xxxii. 2.

“A child” and a “son,”—how are these two expressions to be understood? No doubt, they may be taken, and more commonly are taken, as alike having an aspect towards the human side of our Lord’s nature, but in respect to different phases of His manifestation,—the “child” implying merely that He is the woman’s seed, the “son” that He is descended of David’s royal line, and the destined occupant of his throne. But opinions, and those not ill-supported, gather round the interpretation, that, underlying these two expressions, there is an occult reference to the two-fold nature of Christ. For the word “child” is literally “man-child,” to be born, as only men are born; whilst the added word “son,” may well be taken to refer to the Eternal Son of God.

On such a reading of the prophecy, we should understand the “child,” here spoken of, to stand for the human nature of Messiah, and the “son” to stand for the Divine. And then, what a beautiful fitness is shed over the whole language of the prophecy. For the two natures remained, and manifested themselves, and entered conjointly, but without confusion, into every part of the Saviour’s life and work. The Child was laid in the manger. The Son was attended by a guiding star. The Child was welcomed by shepherds. The Son was hailed

by choirs of angels. The Child was disallowed of men. The Son was glorified and owned of God. The Child could feel the faintings of distress and hunger. The Son wrought miracles to take the hunger of thousands away. The Child suffered death upon the cross. The Son had life in Himself, that death should reign no more. The Child can even now be touched with a feeling of our infirmities;—the Son, in the boundless supremacy of His rule, sits on a throne for ever, rich in crowns of glory, and the world under His feet. And therefore it is that He has “a name which is above every name;” dignities which transcend all finite dignities,—all heavenly, all immortal, all divine. “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

But not less conclusive are the references of the Old Testament, shewing that the Christ Who was to come, while possessor of a proper human nature, had, from all eternity, been Infinite and Divine. Of this, no stronger evidence will be required than that contained in the first of the above citations from Isaiah. Here we have a cluster of titles assigned to Messiah, which, either directly or by implication, suppose Him to be possessed of attributes which never are, or could be laid

claim to, by any finite or created being. Passing over the indirect proof of this contained in the titles "Wonderful," "Counsellor,"—reserved for separate consideration,—the two succeeding titles place the matter beyond all controversy. For first, this Messiah is declared to be "The Mighty God," or God "The Mighty One." Under what encouraging aspects does this bring Christ our Messiah before us? He is "mighty,"—mighty to conquer. His throne is reared on the spoils of victory. Over death, over the grave, over all the crushed powers of darkness, He has asserted His universal dominion. And, in the hearts of His people, He is mighty to conquer also. He bows the will in its rebellion. He deprives the mind of its enmity. He subdues the affections to His control. He makes us willing in the day of His power.

"God the Mighty One;" for He is mighty to redeem also,—from the curse of the Law, from the thralldom of sin, from the captivity of the world, from the power of the grave. Redemption's price is above all price, as well to satisfy the righteous demands of God, as to deliver us from a condition of what must otherwise have been an everlasting slavery. "God the Mighty One:"—for He is mighty to save. He has an

arm of infinite reach, and a sovereignty of boundless rule. All souls are His to deliver; all sins are His to forgive; His are all needful succours to provide, and His are the rewards of all worlds to bestow. He is "The Mighty God."

And then, again, He is called "The everlasting Father." Everlasting, for the Infant of days is also the "Ancient of days:"—the timeless Father of eternity; first before all beginnings, last after all endings; His life covering the measureless duration of two everlastings; "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." But He is the everlasting "Father," it is declared. In what sense are we to understand this? Why that Christ is the great Head and Progenitor of the new spiritual creation,—the Father, by adoption, of an unparadised and outcast family,—the parent of that multitudinous seed, whom, as the travail of His soul, it had been decreed He should have to serve Him. Hence, in one of the prophecies of Him, in Isaiah, we have the expression: "Behold I, and the children whom Thou hast given Me,"*—given Me for Myself: that having begotten them again to a new and lively hope by My resurrection from the dead, I might bestow upon them a pure and undefiled inheritance, and reinstate them in

* Isa. viii. 18.

their lost patrimony of life and immortality. Hence "as in Adam," our first father, "all die; even so in Christ," our spiritual and everlasting Father, "shall all be made alive."* And this prospect of having a numerous seed to come after Him sustained the Holy One, in the prospect of His coming passion:—"Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."† From the fruit of His body, which, hanging on the cross might seem as good as dead, He was to see a seed, great as the stars of heaven for multitude. They should be born again of His Spirit; quickened to newness of life by the power of His word; created anew in His moral image. They shall be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, whilst He, as the Captain and Author of their salvation, shall bring them as His sons unto glory.‡ "He shall be called The mighty God, The everlasting Father."

Hardly need it be pointed out, how much this view of our Lord's Fatherhood and everlasting existence, should add to our confidence in the great work of human redemption. Is the Child of that Jewish maiden in very deed the self-existent

* 1 Cor. xv. 22.

† John xii. 24.

‡ Heb. ii. 10.

I AM? Is He, Who “increased in wisdom and stature,” that uncreated essence which was, and is, and is to come? Is He Who hungered, He Who slept, He Who was wearied and suffered and died, the same Being Who is independent of all duration, and all change, “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”? Then what a majesty does this give to the great sacrifice of the cross? What a seal of unchangeableness does it put upon the work of our salvation? What an assurance, double sure, does it furnish that “He is faithful that hath promised,” and that He is mighty and Almighty, Who shall bring these things to pass.

This assemblage of titles, collected by the Evangelical Prophet,—sparkling like all bright things in the diadem of our God-Man Mediator, are not names only. They tell of attributes and qualifications in Him Who undertakes for us, which are necessary to our salvation. Christ had been no Saviour to us, if, in the unfathomed depths of the Incarnation, He had not been called “Wonderful,”—a miracle. The enemies to our salvation had never been overcome, nor the hindrances to it taken away, if He Who undertook for us had not been the Infinitely wise “Counsellor.” To bring into captivity all the principalities and powers of evil, no power would avail short of

the arm of the “Mighty God;” and He must be the “Everlasting Father,” Who, by His Spirit, could so give us a new birth unto righteousness, as to make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life.

XII.

Christ revealed as The Wonderful.

“And his name shall be called Wonderful.”—Isa. ix. 6.

“This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”—Isa. xxviii. 29.

ALL Jewish commentators are agreed about the reference of this passage to their expected Messiah,—and to this Messiah, especially, as a personage of mysterious attributes and powers. From numerous prophecies we cannot fail to see that the hopes of the Old Testament saints rested upon the advent of such a person. Whether he were to come in the body, they could not tell, or out of the body, they could not tell,—but certainly one who should be partly of earth, and partly of heaven;—in his visible appearance and circumstances, partaking of the human, in the loftiness of his moral endowments, allied to the Divine.

Matter enough, however, for a single Meditation, shall we find in considering the first of these glorious titles. “He shall be called Wonderful,”—literally “a miracle:”—not a miracle-worker, but

a true and proper miracle in Himself. Other Scripture notices of Messiah prepare us for such an announcement, as a common feature of Jewish expectation. One prophet announces the manner of His birth in the words: “The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth:”* another, speaking of His origin, says: “Who shall declare His generation?”† The great prophecy of His preternatural conception is announced in the words: “The Lord Himself shall give you a sign;”‡ whilst in the passage which has suggested our Meditation, we find that, the very child who, in the beginning of the verse is set forth as “a child,”—a born infant of this sin-stricken world, is, as we have seen, immediately afterwards declared to be “The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

No doubt the strange centering, in the same Person, of opposite, and almost conflicting attributes,—the finite and the Infinite, the mortal and the Everlasting, the infant of days and the Potentate of universal rule, is a great mystery. But so also is the moral misery and evil, which He Who is called Wonderful, came into our world to undo and to destroy. As far as our limited powers are competent to entertain such a subject, this meeting of the two

* Jer. xxxi. 22.

† Isa. liii. 8.

‡ Isa. vii. 14.

extremes of being, in one Person, was the means, and the only means for providing an acceptable or effective mediation. The two parties to be reconciled are God and the sinner. And if a sinner needs a finite person, in order that the atonement should be just, the Almighty requires an Infinite person, in order that the atonement should be perfect. If the justice of God could be vindicated only by the condemnation of One in human nature, the sin of man could be covered only by the propitiation of One Who should be Divine.

In the original miraculousness of His nature then, as the Incarnate Word, as the manifested Deity, as the God-Man Jesus, Christ may truly be called "the Wonderful." The mystery is one which angels desire to look into, but it is too high for them. And we may rejoice that it should be so. Our gratitude would not be heightened, neither would our reverence be, to have our conceptions of Him Who is to undertake for us, brought down to the low platform of our finite ideals and creature thoughts. Better is it that He should withdraw Himself into the far back solitudes of incomprehensible Being,—at once the adored of the highest seraph, and the trusted of the poorest outcast,—the Unknown, the Unseen, "the Wonderful."

But observe another reason for giving to Christ this special designation of the "Wonderful," namely, that He would inspire with wondering awe the minds of all who should either hear His words, or witness His works among men.

Men marvelled at the superhuman wisdom of His discourses. "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" was the amazed question of the Scribes and Pharisees. Not that He was any prophesier of smooth things. On the contrary, He dealt with topics which people generally do not much like to hear about:—such as the spiritual nature of the Gospel kingdom; the necessity of repentance and self-denial and holiness of life, in all who should become followers of Messiah; the agency of the Holy Spirit to enlighten, and renew, and sanctify the soul. Yet, these hard things notwithstanding, "all the people were very attentive to hear Him." The reason was they could not help it. It was not that the fascinations of His human eloquence were upon them,—soul speaking to soul, and heart beating with heart. It was something more than that. It was the spell of goodness, of greatness, of high and commanding authority. There was a grand and dignified assumption of heavenly claims which they could not account for. A Teacher, and able to reveal all the secrets in the heart of God,—

a Nazarene, and able to say that, being “in the bosom of the Father,”* He could unfold the Divine plans and purposes towards our race from the very youth and morning of the world,—who could this be? Who but He of Whom it was written: “His name shall be called Wonderful.”

Nor less did Christ fill all beholders with amazement by the miracles that He did. After the stilling of the tempest we read,—“But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”† It seemed to them as if the words of Christ were to be taken without limit: “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father.”‡ All things, whether they be diseases to cure, infirmities to take away, blind eyes to open, or evil spirits to expel;—whether it be the angry sea to calm, or the famishing multitude to feed, or the reluctant grave to compel to give back its prey. More than this, not only did He work miracles, but He was in Himself the centre, and spring, and vital source of miracle. He could impart virtue to the hem of a garment. He could cause wonders to follow on the mention of His name. Handkerchiefs, brought from the bodies of His servants, were made effectual to heal many of their plagues; and heaven’s blessing

* John i. 18.

† Mark iv. 41.

‡ Matt. xi. 27.

is made to rest where even the shadow of an apostle falls.

But again, is not Christ rightly called “Wonderful” on account of His exceeding great love towards us? It is described as a love which passeth knowledge. In its length, and breadth, and depth, and height, it transcends the comprehension of all saints. It is a mine, of which the riches are unsearchable. This love is wonderful in its freeness,—without money and without price; without consideration and without merit; manifesting itself while as yet the heart of the race was in a posture of rebellion against Him, neither desiring a Saviour, nor feeling their need of one. It is “Wonderful” in the objects of its selection; passing by the self-righteous and the proud, it singles out the adulteress in her shame, the extortioner at his toll-booth, the malefactor on the cross, the persecutor in his bigot rage, and the cruel prison-keeper in his hardness of heart. It is “Wonderful” in its unchangeableness, loving whom it loves even “unto the end,” through all infirmities and mistakes and faults,—Peter through his denials, Thomas through his unbelief, James and John through their contention for high places, the whole company of the disciples, through their unkind desertion of Him in the hour of need.

“I am the Lord, I change not,”* and My love changes not. There is no variableness in it, neither shadow of turning. What it was yesterday, it is today, will be for ever. It is the love of the “Wonderful.”

Not indeed that believers are able to see the wonderfulness of that love now, or ever will see it, until the day of His appearing. Only in that day will they be able to understand by what marvellous by-paths of cloud and sunshine, rough places and smooth, green pastures and tangled briars, their Angel-Redeemer had brought them. Only then will they see Who fought with them and fought for them; how obstacles to their salvation were removed, and enemies were overcome, and outward providences were sanctified and blessed,—every sorrow, and every joy, and every temptation, fitted into its place in the mighty adjustments of the kingdom, and all things working together for good. Often the hard things of our life had been pain and grief to us;—why we were so frequently thrown back in our Christian course; why the thorn in the flesh so long rankled within us; why our desires after spiritual usefulness were so long thwarted; why doors for blessing opened not, and why to prayers,—prayers which in

* Mal. iii. 6.

themselves we felt must be acceptable,—Christ answered not a word. But now we are permitted to see that all this “cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”* The clearing up of mysteries is not a promise of the present state. “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” Then will Christ be admired of His saints. Then will be the day of magnificent surprises. Then will the lid be lifted off the ark of God’s secret things. Then shall we see why, first among the prophetic titles of Messiah, the prophet wrote down that word,—“His Name shall be called Wonderful.”

* Isa. xxviii. 29.

XIII.

Christ revealed as The Counsellor.

“His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor.”—Isa. ix. 6.

“Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?”—Rom. xi. 34.

THE subject of our last meditation was Christ the “Wonderful,” or Christ the “Miracle,” as the word might be rendered. For such He truly was—a miracle in His generation; a miracle in His participation of two distinct but unconfounded natures; a miracle of glorious perfections, meeting as in a blazing centre of light and strength; a miracle of love to pity, a miracle of might to save. “He shall be called Wonderful.”

We come to the second title, here given to Messiah:—“He shall be called Counsellor,” or the “Angel of the Great Counsel” as the Septuagint puts it. The expression will be seen to have fitness, if we consider Christ, as having an equal voice in the eternal counsels of the Father: the counsels, especially, which have respect to the plan and

method of our salvation. These counsels, as we see, must originate with God Himself. Man was without strength, and could do nothing. Redemption must have its rise and spring in the spontaneous compassions of the Almighty,—cancelling the original terms of human service, and causing a new compact or covenant to be made with us, adapted to the exigencies of our lapsed condition. Now the feature of this covenant, we are especially to notice, as bearing on this Title of Christ, is that it is a covenant which, in some special sense, God is pleased to make with His dear Son. Thus, in the Psalms we read: “I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant.”* And in Zechariah, speaking of Him Who is called “the Branch,” it is said: “Behold He shall build the temple of the Lord; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both:”† whilst, in the book of Proverbs, in a passage which, in every age of the Church, has been referred to Messiah, we read: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old when He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, counsel is mine, and

* Psa. lxxxix. 8.

† Zech. vi. 13.

sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.” *

Neither should we limit these high and lofty conferences between the Father and the Son to the first devising of the conditions of the covenant, “ordered in all things and sure,” but should regard them as extending to all the means and appliances for making this covenant available to our salvation. Every thing, relating to our soul’s peace, was made matter of high deliberation and forethought, in these counsels between God and His Christ,—our sins, and how they should be taken away; our enemies, and how they should be overcome; our consciences, and how they should be pacified; our hearts, and how they should be comforted; our souls, and how they should be schooled, and disciplined, and prepared for heaven. In this august title of Christ, we recognise a proof that, in regard to our salvation, “all things are naked and open to Him with Whom we have to do;” that Christ our Lord was privy to all the transactions of eternity; that He had an equal share in the provisions and predestinations of the Infinite Mind; in a word, that in all things pertaining to the safe keeping of our souls, He is Jehovah’s fellow; the impersonated Wisdom; the

* Prov. viii. 14-22 et seq.

Divine Counsellor. Surely, in Christ, and in Christ only, can we find any answer to that question of the Apostle: "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?"

But another reason for the Title, here given to Christ, we may find in the fact, that, in all ages, He has ever been the over-ruling Mind and supreme Director of His Church. Of course, in the different dispensations which have been given to the world, we are to see only connected parts of one great whole—continuous emanations of the One Supreme Intelligence. What to us may appear changes in the Divine plan,—one method under the Law, and another method under the Gospel—are not changes but developments,—adapted to the progressive stages of human character, and to the advances in human thought. Under all dispensations, however, the Head over all things to His Church is one, and the Counsellor is one. In the Old Testament Scriptures, we cannot fail to see that the one object which stands out for human contemplation, is the great promise of a Mediator. And it is as sustaining this office to His Church, that we are permitted to look to Christ under the New Testament. We know that, around that Church, dark and thick clouds are seen to gather continually. Errors abound; divisions

rankle; extinct heresies crop up anew; men are losing their ancient reverence for inspiration; Satan is getting the advantage by means of the strifes among Christians; and, by the "oppositions of science, falsely so called," the foundations of the faith seem to be giving way. But to Whom do we look to shield us from these mischiefs, or to guide the Church safely through them all, but to Him, Who in view of all the evil days that were coming upon her, gave to her first guardians and defenders the promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world?"*

Under all the difficulties and discouragements that threaten the faith of the Gospel, this is our refuge, and this our strength, that "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." We live under the constant tutelage and defence of Him Who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will:" Who laughs to scorn the devices of the people; Who holds in derision the banded confederacies of Satan; Who, over the wreck of ruined plots, and defeated purposes, and bad men's hopes, and good men's fears, pronounces the irresistible decree: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure."†

We note one other reason why Christ is called

* Matt. xxviii. 20. † Isa. xlvi. 10.

“Counsellor;” namely, as He has a voice in the outer life of each individual believer. The moral providence which shapes the course, and orders all things for the happiness of believers, is the standing lesson of Old Testament history. Testimonies, in illustration of this might be cited abundantly from the history of Moses, and Abraham, and Joseph, and David, and Saul, all proving that, while He Who is “wonderful in counsel,” is ever working for the good of His Church, and the glory of His great name; He is, at the same time, shaping the course of our individual lot,—choosing our inheritance for us, and fixing the bounds of our habitation. Having deigned to accept our salvation, as the only recompense for His earthly agonies, His eye is never off us, nor His supporting arm far away. He knows that, on our way to the better land, we shall have foes to encounter, and dangers to face, and difficulties to overcome, and false advisers to lead astray, and therefore He is made to us an Advocate, a hand to beckon, and a voice to call. “The Lord shall guide thee continually,”* runs the promise. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God,”† it is written. We may be, by nature we all are, as destitute of all good things, as was the Church of Laodicea; but for gold as we are

* Isa. lviii. 11.

† James i. 5.

poor, for raiment as we are clothed with shame; for anointing eye-salve, that we may see the things which belong unto our peace, the words of Him that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, are: "I counsel thee to buy of me."* "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."†

In its individual applications, the great lesson of this Title of Messiah is, that, taken in connection with the guiding work of the Holy Spirit, it assures us of the means of daily sympathy and converse with the heavenly powers, in all things that pertain to our salvation. As with a friend that "sticketh closer than a brother," we are permitted to take the closest bosom counsel with the Lord Jesus. We lay our hearts open to Him,—tell Him our mind, and all our mind,—the fears which disturb, the temptations which harass, the cares which distract, the sinful tendencies which remain in us, and would fain get the mastery. We enquire diligently of Him, how His cross is to be borne; how His precepts are to be obeyed; how His favour is to be secured; how we may know that we love Him, and that He loves us; and how we may attain to a calm restful assurance that we are in the way of life. We consult Him for our conversation,

* Rev. iii. 18.

† Psa. lxxiii. 24.

that it may be blameless; for our life, that it may be useful; for our friendships, that they may be hallowed; for our joys, that they may be pure; and for our sorrows and trials, that they may all be sanctified and blessed. And in thus taking counsel with the Holy One, we expect, and wait, and listen, as if assured that He will give us the advice we need: that, by His Spirit, His heart will speak to our heart;—the very tones of heaven coming into our ears as distinctly, as, by means of that last wonder of modern science, the voices of the loved and the absent are repeated audibly through leagues of space. “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”*

Oh! who among us will not take earnest heed to that word: not turning away from it as Felix did; not wresting it to our own destruction as Balaam did. But obediently as Samuel did, when he said: “Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth;” meekly as the Blessed Virgin did, when she said: “Be it unto me according to Thy word.” Like as Abraham obeyed a Divine call to go out, not knowing whither he went, so should we follow intimations of heaven’s will, which come in answer to humble seeking for

* Isa. xxx. 21.

its guidance. The intimations come not of the will of man, nor of the teachings of sense, nor of blind chance. They are voices from the throne ; utterances from the thick cloud ; the high and holy behests of Him Whose “name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor.”

XIV.

The near Coming announced by Malachi.

“And the Lord, Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, Whom ye delight in : behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming ? and who shall stand when He appeareth ?”—Mal. iii. 1, 2.

“The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts : and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.”—Hag. ii. 9.

As the time of the Advent drew nigh, the attention of devout minds was called to the many prophecies, which had gone before, with respect to Messiah : and especially those which clustered round the temple at Jerusalem. For these prophecies did something more than point to the historic fact of Christ’s coming. His divine nature, His heavenly designation, the manner of His appearing, and the glory that should follow,—all these are brought out in strong relief constantly. But in Malachi, the last of the goodly fellowship, these prophecies culminate in emphasis and distinctness. For

nearly four hundred years after, the world was to be favoured with no more of these inspired utterances. Let the people take heed to the last sounds as they died away:—“Behold, the Lord, Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, Whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?”

In this prophecy, it should be noted how the Divine nature of our Lord is brought out:—He is “the Lord, the Messenger of the covenant.” The expression would not be without its significance to the Jewish mind. For besides the use of the Jehovistic name, “The Lord,” the term “Messenger,” in such a connection, had a special meaning. For a messenger is one sent: and “the sent” was one of the recognised Messianic names, the divine “Shiloh,”—according to that prophecy of Jacob, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, till Shiloh come.”* And these different expressions were, by the most devout and enlightened thinkers, among the Jews, understood of a Divine Being. The point is important, because, ample as may be

* Gen. xlix. 10.

the proofs supplied by the New Testament of what our Christ was, it is essential to shew their agreement with what, according to prophecy, the Christ of Jewish expectation was to be. And the agreement will be found throughout;—beginning with Moses, through Joshua, with his typical prefix of Jehovah, on to Daniel, in his vision of the “Ancient of Days,” or to Isaiah in the titles of “the mighty God, the everlasting Father,”—all proving that, whether Jesus of Nazareth were Divine or not, Divine He must be, if it were of Him Malachi was speaking when he said,—“the Lord Whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, Whom ye delight in.”

Consider next, some of the occasions on which the prophecy here given had its fulfilment: “The Lord Whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple.” The expression “suddenly” would suggest a reference to some special and unexpected appearances in the temple. And of these there were several. Thus there was our Lord’s first presentation there, as an infant. Long had Simeon waited for that glad sight, and long had Anna prayed. But the time was secret. At last, by a divine inspiration upon their souls, they are led, at a particular instant, to enter the sacred

edifice. Wherefore they were so led, they knew not. But on coming in, they found it was to see the Lord's Christ.

Then there was His appearance, on going up to the Passover, at the age of twelve years:—an occasion, which may have been specially in the mind of the Spirit, when inditing these words of Malachi, because it exactly coincided, in point of time, with the year, when, by the deposition and banishment of Archelaus, the sceptre departed from Judah, and the people became absolutely subject to the Roman power. Then did Shiloh come,—come in a way that men looked not for. They marvelled, as well they might, at that miracle of youthful intelligence,—standing unawed, in the midst of the reverend, and the learned, and the grave; unknown of any and unheard of; and yet astonishing all that listened to Him by His understanding and answers. But as yet they knew not that Scripture, or at least knew not how to apply it,—“the Lord Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple.”

Yet more remarkable, as a fulfilment of this prophecy, was the incident of the driving of the money-changers from the temple. Of this, one instance occurred at the last Passover observed by the Holy Saviour, and was within a few days of

His passion. A remarkable change in His whole manner had begun to shew itself. Instead of shrinking from public observation, He lays Himself out for it; instead of tearing Himself away from those who would, by force, have made Him a King, He, of purpose, allows the multitude to strew their garments in the way, that He may enter into Jerusalem in royal state. He alights at the door of the temple. And entering in, suddenly, and to the amazement of all, claims it as His temple:—His to magnify by the glory of His presence; His to purge of all that was desecrating and unworthy; His to dedicate, and sanctify, and consecrate anew, as a house of prayer for all people. We know what followed:—how the usurers fled; and the people were astonished; and the priests and scribes murmured, all ready to say one to another: “What meaneth this?” But would there not be, among the worshippers in that temple, some men of faith and piety, who, on witnessing such things would say: “Surely this day is that Scripture fulfilled in our ears and before our eyes,—‘Behold the days come when the Lord, Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts?’”

And then note, further, what the prophet intimates as to the effect of this coming of Christ. He shall come,—“But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” On a first reading of the words, we should say they must refer to the coming of Christ to judgment. And no doubt, they do. But not to that only. For when we remember some of the effects which followed on our Lord’s first coming;—what a searching light was thrown thereby on human character and human motives; how, by the power of His Divine utterances, the axe was seen to be laid to the root of the tree; how hypocrisy and formality were exposed, and dead works were held up to scorn, and the thoughts of many hearts were revealed; how the Gospel, like a two-edged sword, pierced even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and was made a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart:—when we consider what an awakening power there is, in Christ’s words, to set a man upon the trial of his own spirit; to make him try, and examine himself, whether his heart be humble, his will resigned, his lusts subdued, his tempers under subjection; whether he has love for Christ, and all that leads to Christ, as prayer, hearing the word, the society of good

men, holy sacraments; whether by the work of the Holy Spirit within him, he can say his eyes have been opened, his mind renewed, his whole man born again, and his whole heart changed,—when we consider all this mighty process of searching, and sifting, and digging down to the lowest depths of a man's moral being, and this, as a fruit and accompaniment of Christ's first coming,—then, even to the coming of Christ in the flesh, there seems no impropriety in applying those words of Malachi,—“But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?”

Still, as a practical Advent lesson for ourselves, and in view of the coming which is yet future, we may fitly ask of ourselves: “Who shall stand when He appeareth?” And the answer will be: They are those who delight to exercise their thoughts much on the Lord's coming again:—loving His appearing, and looking for it; desiring to be getting ready for their inheritance, even as their inheritance is getting ready for them. They are those who watch, and pray, and sit loosely to the things of time, as knowing that “the time is short,” and that, before a generation has passed away, the world and all things that are therein may not be. These shall behold an Advent

Saviour without dismay. These shall be “found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” These, unmoved by any amazement, “shall abide the day of His coming.” These “shall stand when He appeareth.”

XV.

**The Ministry of the Baptist a preparation
for Christ's coming.**

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”—Isa. xl. 3.

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways.”—Luke i. 76.

WE can well understand how the terms “wilderness” and “desert” should be applied to the mental and spiritual condition of the whole heathen world, at the close of the Old Testament times. But, in connection with the immediate forerunner of Christ, it is important to remember that the ministry of the Baptist is only the last link of a long chain of preparations, by which mankind were made to see how long, and how earnestly, the will of God had been set upon our deliverance, as well as how He had kept alive the expectation of it, in the hearts of fallen man. Long before that voice had been heard preaching in the

wilderness, the world had been looking for the Advent of some Great One. Who He was to be, and What He was to be, they could not tell:—save that He was to be “the Desire of all nations,” and the hope of all the ends of the earth. Like as with other potentates, His immediate coming should be announced by a loud-proclaiming herald:—and as a trumpet-blast, in the ear of the nations, should be heard “the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

The expression “prepare ye the way of the Lord,” may be considered as implying the gradual and progressive unfolding of the Divine purposes, in regard to the Messiah; the teaching of mankind by little and little, until that crisis in the world’s history should arrive, when, its education being complete, it might be prepared and ready for the Lord’s appearing. Several passages, in Scripture, point to some such definite period, in the history of the Church, when it might be expected Christ should come. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ;”* we read in one place. And again, “When we were yet without strength, in due time

* Eph. i. 10.

Christ died for the ungodly."* Or again; "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."† In these passages, and, especially in the last, the supposition is made of certain analogies subsisting between man's life and the world's life:—the world being in infancy, before the Law; taught by tutors and governors, under the Law; and only attaining to its spiritual majority, to the privileges and adoption of sons, after the Law, when the cycles of dispensational training were complete.

The world, we say, had its infant training in order to "prepare the way of the Lord." Its first and most precious lesson followed, as we have seen, immediately upon the fall of man. While Adam was yet trembling in the presence of his offended Maker; while he was feeling, for the first time, the scorpion stings of a guilty conscience, and wondering what awful mystery might be locked up in that sentence, "Thou shalt die,"—then it was that his anguished heart was comforted by that word of promise: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Very obscure and undefined might their anticipations be of their future Deliverer. All their knowledge seemed to

* Rom. v. 6.

† Gal. iv. 4.

amount to this,—that He should be One “born of a woman;” that He should utterly overturn the empire of sin and evil; that in some way,—a way darkly signified by their early sacrifices,—He should bear the sin which was their due; that He should recover for them their lost immortality; in a word, that He should “finish the transgression, and make an end of sins, and bring in an everlasting righteousness.*”

Other stages of this disciplinary preparation followed, in the order of their course. After the deluge, the covenant of mercy was renewed in Noah; and through him, and those that came after, the traditional knowledge of the Messiah was kept up in the earth, until the time of Abraham. In him, those who were being schooled in the great lesson of the Divine purposes, found themselves advanced to a higher form. They were to be singled out of God from the rest of the nations, as the conservators of His name and worship in the earth; as the custodians and witnesses of His truth; and indeed as the depositaries of all those pledges and engagements, by which, in the person of Jesus Christ, He had from all eternity, decreed He would restore and pardon man.

* Dan. ix. 24.

From the time of Abraham, 'the way of the Lord' became prepared more fully and more rapidly. All the Mosaic institutions, from beginning to end, were types, foreshadowings, visible embodiments of Christ. The people saw Him in the structure of their tabernacle; saw Him in their temple-worship; saw Him in their victorious chiefs; saw Him in their national deliverances. Christ was in the sea, when it parted; in the pillar of fire, when it shone; in the rock, when it gushed out with water; in the manna, when it fell from heaven. And so with regard to all the prophets which came after. Each had some fresh light to throw on the great promise of the ages, causing that the expectation of it should never languish, and never die out. Thus, from the time of Adam, down to the reign of Cæsar Augustus, God had always been preparing and making ready the way for Christ:—adapting His successive revelations to that end; disposing the changes of national revolutions to that end; shaping the entire course of His moral providence to that end, —practically, and in effect, saying to every king that reigned, to every prophet that spake, to every priest that offered, and every holy man that prayed,—“Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

On the more immediate and direct preparation

for Christ's coming, in the person and ministry of the Baptist, it is not needful to enlarge. The prophecies, pointing to Christ, had been many; each advancing upon its predecessor, in definiteness and converging point. Still, towards the close of the prophetical history, it had been ordained, that there should be a great blank,—a wide gap in the series of Divine announcements. It was to be only immediately before the Advent of Christ, that people were to look for any re-opening of communications with the Church: and then they were to expect it to come by the ministry of a personal forerunner, one who should “go before the face of the Lord, and prepare His way.”

The prophecy was fulfilled in the Baptist. And every thing in the character, circumstances, family history, and wonderful birth of this forerunner, tended to prepare and awaken the popular mind, as portending some great thing about to happen. The whole hill-country of Judæa had been roused to a pitch of eager expectation. Both neighbours, and multitudes from far, gathered round the humble dwelling of Zecharias, exclaiming one to another,—“Who is this? what manner of child shall this be?” And a voice from the excellent glory makes answer:—“This is the Lord shewing mercy unto Zion; for the time to favour her, yea,

the set time is come."* Communications between God and His Church are to be renewed. The string of the dumb tongue of prophecy is loosened. He is coming; He is coming; even at your doors. And the cry of that infant you are listening to,—that child "wonderfully born," is no other than that of which Isaiah spake when he said: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a high-way for our God."

Our concluding Meditation, on our Lord's FIRST coming, may suggest one practical thought. After all these matured and magnificent preparations for the coming of Christ,—by prophecy, by type, by sacrifices, by dispensational orderings,—how did mankind receive Him when He came? Listen to the words of the Evangelist John. They seem to be written not in anger, but in a spirit of pained astonishment, solemn sadness, tender melancholy:—"He came unto His own; but His own received Him not:"† would not find or make a place for Him:—not in their creed, not in their homes, not in their hearts. And is not this the grief of the Holy Saviour even unto this day? that men will not receive Him; will not welcome Him; will not come unto Him that they might

* Psa. cii. 13.

† John i. 11.

have life. And surely it aggravates this refusal so much the more, that all He asks at our hands, is a kindly and obedient reception of Him. For observe how that passage in St. John's Gospel runs on: "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God: even to them that believe on His name."*

Fitly then, may we solemnize our Advent season, by urging upon ourselves the momentous question, 'Have we received Christ?' He has come to His own,—He, the long prepared for, and desired, and promised. And, in a certain sense, we have received Him, as giving a name to our faith, a form to our worship, a baptismal entrance to our Church. But have we received Him into our minds to know Him; into our wills to serve Him; into our homes to honour Him; into our hearts to cleave to, and adore, and love Him? Oh! if, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we have been able thus to receive Christ, in His FIRST coming, doubt we not that, at His SECOND coming, He will, with all joy, receive us:—receive our bodies from the grave, receive our spirits up into the clouds, receive our redeemed souls into the mansions of His Father's house, receive us into His eternal and glorious kingdom, to sit on a throne by His side.

* John i. 12.

PART II.

Meditations on the Second Coming.

O day of life, of light, of love !
The onely day dealt from above !
A day so fresh, so bright, so brave,
'Twill shew us each forgotten grave,
And make the dead, like flowers, arise
Youthful and fair to see new skies.
All other days, compar'd to thee,
Are but light's weak minority ;
They are but veils, and cyphers drawn
Like clouds, before thy glorious dawn.
O come ! arise ! shine ! do not stay,
Dearly lov'd day !
The fields are long since white, and I
With earnest groans for freedom cry ;
My fellow creatures too say, *Come !*
And stones, though speechless, are not dumb.
When shall we hear that glorious voice
Of life and joys ?
That voice, which, to each secret bed
Of my Lord's dead,
Shall bring true day, and make dust see
The way to immortality ?

HENRY VAUGHAN.

Forthwith from all Winds
The living, and forthwith the cited dead
Of all past Ages, to the general Doom
Shall hasten, such a peal shall rouse their sleep
Then, all thy Saints assembled, thou shalt judge
Bad men and Angels ; they arraign'd shall sink
Beneath thy Sentence ; Hell, her numbers full,
Thenceforth shall be forever shut. Meanwhile
The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
New Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell,
And after all their tribulations long
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,
With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth.

MILTON. *Paradise Lost (Bk. iii.).*

XVI.

The Manner of the Lord's Second Coming.

"Behold, He cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."—Rev. i. 7.

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."—Acts i. 11.

It is apparent from many Scriptures, that the early Christians lived in constant expectation of Christ's second coming, as an event very near at hand. They could think of nothing else. It gave a tone to their discourse, put a check upon their ambitions, threw, over all their plans and purposes, a tinge of solemnness, and uncertainty, and transient life. And the anticipation was mingled with much of holy desirousness also. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,"* is the Apostle's expression. "Looking for" it, with holy longing,—as a prisoner awaits his promised

* Tit. ii. 13.

release, as men in a besieged city descry approaching succours, as the tired watchman waits for the morning. And this is the reason why the day of the Lord is often expressed by New Testament writers as "that day." "The Lord grant that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day."* All would know what day was meant. For it was the day, to which, for the grandeur of its manifestations and the mightiness of its issues, there could be none second, and none like. It was the day of all days. Centuries, milleniads, yea a foregone eternity itself might gather up their contributions of incident and story, but yet would they seem but "as a tale that is told," when measured by the discoveries of that day,—the day when the Lord "shall so come from heaven as disciples had seen Christ go into heaven."

In considering the manner of this appearing, the first thing that strikes us is that, all the accounts combine in magnifying the pomp and glory that shall be connected with it. There is an evident purpose, in the descriptions, to impress the mind with a solemn and indescribable awe. And they do so by their majestic vastness. We read them, but the poetry of inspiration is too high for us. The tired thought is baffled, in its attempts

* 2 Tim. i. 18.

to clothe the imagery with shape or form; and imagination folds its wings in despair. Better to let the expressions stand in all their sublime and awe-inspiring simplicity. The Son of man will come in "the clouds of heaven." He will be clothed with "light as with a garment." Ten thousand times ten thousand angels will herald His approach; and the heavens and the earth, at His awful presence, will make to themselves wings and flee away. And the sea and the waves roaring; and the mountains and hills scattered; and the sun and all bright things paling themselves in eternal eclipse before the "light of light," and the "very God of very God,"—all these will proclaim with consentaneous voice, "The Lord is at hand."

But another feature of this second coming of Christ, much insisted upon in Scripture, is, the suddenness and unexpectedness of the appearing. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."* "In such an hour as ye think not."† It will be, as we are told it was on that morning, when the sun had risen upon Sodom. Men will look abroad, and see nothing to alarm them. There is a smile on the face of nature, verdure on the fruitful hills, melody in the song of birds,—the noise of axe and

* 1 Thess. v. 2.

† Matt. xxiv. 44.

hammer proclaim the busy work of the sons of toil, and the sound of tabret and harp tells of those who are making merry at the feast,—when, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the din ceases, and all creation is hushed into silence, on hearing “the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.”

Now, do we, in our hearts, believe these things ? Is there not a tendency in most of us, to regard the second coming of Christ as a contingency, too remote to influence individual conduct ? Do we not allow ourselves to buy and sell, to plant and build, to marry and be given in marriage, in the full assurance that, before Christ comes, a far-stretching train of prophetic fulfilments must take place, which will cover, and more than cover, any length of days that may be assigned to us ? We would stand in awe of the presumption, which would pry into “the times and seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.” But then, the same reverent spirit which forbids me to predict the time when the coming of Christ SHALL be, forbids me also to scoop out a given portion of this world’s life-time, within which this coming shall not be. Who are we that we should measure or define the resources of an infinite Mind ? In six days, we are told, did

this world rise out of elemental confusion, a thing of light, and loveliness, and order, and grandeur, and beauty; who shall say that centuries are necessary for repairing the waste places of the earth,—for the diffusion of universal light,—for a mighty out-pouring of a pentecostal fire upon the nations,—for the inaugurating of the reign of millennial blessedness and peace,—for binding in everlasting chains the foes of the Redeemer,—for the completion of that full cycle of events, and wonders, and prophecies, all of which we know must have their accomplishment, before heaven and earth shall ring with the triumphant shout, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints.”

Observe next, with regard to this second coming of Christ, it will be a universally manifest appearing. “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.”* Here every word is calculated to stir up deep emotion. First, “every eye” shall see Him. The whole congregation of sleeping dead shall wake up,—from every kindred gathered, from every nation called, from every grave and deep sea raised up. No depths shall hide from

* Rev. i. 7.

that appalling brightness, and no eyelids slumber through nature's last and universal din. And men shall "see Him as He is." Their eyes shall behold Him and not another. Behold Him, robed in the brightness of His Father's glory; crowned with many crowns; shining as the sun in his strength. The visage which was "marred more than any man's," will then be resplendent with more than the transfiguration brightness; and the body on which scourge, and nails, and thorns, and spear had left marks of unholy wantonness, will then be fashioned as a "glorious body," and reflect the express image of God.

"And they also who pierced Him," it is said. They too must be brought face to face with the Advent Saviour:—the time-serving and miserable Pilate; the conscience-sold and mocking Herod; the buyers of the purple robe, and the makers of the platted crown; the bystanders who prepared the sponge, and the soldier who pierced the sacred side. All these. But their name is legion who come under the designation, "they also who pierced Him." For all sins are the Lord's crucifiers. He is pierced by indifference, and unbelief, and selfishness, and love of this present world. He is pierced by sloth, and formality, and reluctance to holy duties, and neglect of prayer. He is

pierced by tempers that are not curbed, by desires that are not holy, by thoughts that are not pure, by words that are not just and true. None of these, if repented of, bewailed, cleansed away in the fountain open for sin and uncleanness, will lose us our part with those who "shall not be ashamed before the Lord Jesus at His coming,"*—but if otherwise, they who are chargeable with such things, will be considered as having "crucified the Son of God afresh," and will have to cast in their lot with Herod, and Caiaphas, and Pontius Pilate, in the day when the Lord shall visit this our earth again, clothed in "the glory of the Father, and all His holy angels with Him."

One sad thought mingles with these reflections; one, as strange as it is sad; namely, that men should read of a second coming of Christ, and believe in a second coming, and profess to be looking for a second coming, and yet be living as the majority of them do:—for the manifestation, so unprepared; against the impending doom, so shelterless; for the awful assize upon souls, so unprovided with Advocate, or answer, or plea. A mercy, of which they know neither the security nor the conditions, is their only hope. They surround themselves with a hazy theology, and

* 1 John ii. 28.

cannot see the terrible realities which are approaching them, through the darkness of their self-created mist. Oh ! let us see to it that it be not so with us. Let us try the foundation of our hope, what it is ; and having tried it, and proved it sure, let us aim to be of those who love and look for the day of the Lord's appearing. Let our converse be more with the spiritual and unseen. Let us exhibit, in our daily walk, more of the resources of a hidden life. Let it be seen that we are not dependent for our happiness, on anything the world can give, or lessen, or injure, or take away ; so that, in that day, when the Lord comes with power and great glory, we may hail with gladness the advent of the Saviour Redeemer, and not be afraid of the Saviour Judge.

XVII.

Judgment executed upon the Ungodly.

“Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed.”—Jude 14, 15.

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”—Rev. xx. 15.

On the general proofs of a judgment to come, there is no need to insist. The certainty of it rests upon evidence, if possible, more indestructible than that of the Bible itself. Lower than the sea's lowest depths might we bury every copy of the written word ; as a faded night vision, suppose every representation of the last assize to pass from human thought,—and yet never should we be able to get rid of the stern inevitable fact, that we must all “give account of ourselves to God.”* The idea of it is interwoven with the very fabric and texture of our being. A future judgment seems like a part of the natural history of humanity. Its methods, its processes, its very recompenses

* Rom. xiv. 12.

seem to be lined and traced out on the human conscience,—“graven as with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever.” Obliterate, if you will, that net-work of veins which thicken on the surface of the polished marble; pick out, if you will, those fibrous threads which make up the beautiful anatomy of the forest leaf,—but never, out of the interlacing web and fibre of man’s moral organisation, will you be able to eradicate that his first thought and his last, the idea of a retribution to come.

And it is not a passive idea merely. That sin of twenty years ago,—which no eye was witness to, or which there is no living tongue to reveal, which is as sure a secret from man, as if the only record of it were buried in the heart of some Egyptian pyramid,—why should it sometimes trouble the sinner now? What should make it such an impossible thing for him to forget? Why can nothing be found to divert the bloodhound conscience from its pursuit? or to still those reproachful mutterings, coming up from the soul’s lowest depths, and saying, “My sin is ever before me?” The answer is that a future judgment is an eternal ordinance of God, and that man’s whole life is a continual shadow of its coming. The dark shade is upon our path all our journey

through. In the terror of infancy, as it dreads correction; on the face of youth, as it turns red with shame; in the guilty tremblings of manhood, as it can bear the sharp tooth of conviction no longer, and with a promise of giving heed at some more "convenient season," is obliged to waive the faithful man of God away,*—we have nature's first draft of a great Bible picture,—the book, the Judge, the witnesses, the final separation, and the opened door of two great worlds.

Christ then will come "to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds." "Convince them"—how will He do this? Why by making them to see their natural face in a glass; by confronting them with a forgotten past; making them read, item by item, all that is written in the Angel's doomsday book. There will each read, for himself, the history of a heart and its deceits; of a conscience and its struggles; of the carnal mind and its mad strivings against God, and truth, and holiness, and heaven,—thoughts, intents, desires, purposes, all minutely journalized,—the dark and dreary autobiography of a lost soul. And why is this book opened, and, before heaven's high judicature revealed, and read aloud? Why just

* Acts xxiv. 25.

that its disclosures may be collated with the entries in another book. For so read we, in that solemn description given in the Book of Revelation. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the Book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books * And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

“Into the lake of fire,” and again “into the fire that never shall be quenched.” Into the import of such awful words, we presume not to enquire more particularly. We may even leave out the physical and material parts of the description altogether, and think of the cup of wrath as containing moral ingredients only,—the sinner left to make his own hell, and to live in it; his fierce passions an unconsumed fire; his guilty remembrances a never-sated worm; his mist of darkness the gloom of unending despair; the slavery of sin his everlasting chain, and his curse, his immortality. Surely, we have only to imagine the condition of a soul that feels itself cut off eternally from the presence of God; its lot cast irrevocably in a prayerless, hopeless, Christless world: its future

* Rev. xx. 12, 15.

fellowships with evil only, and that continually,—and all this aggravated by the thought that it had brought itself into this condition, by its obstinacy, and hardness of heart, and blind self-will. We have only to make such suppositions, and if the poetry of retribution were not, and the dark pictures of the Apocalypse were not, all the elements of the most fearful retribution we could think of, are to be found in the sinner's own breast.

“I'll tell thee what is hell—thy memory
Still mounted up with records of the past
Heap over heap of blest occasions trifled o'er or spurned
Now numbered with the irrevocable past.”

However the subject is one which, as our great Hooker says, “should be handled with a bleeding heart.” There should be a tender awe upon our spirits, lest we sadden the hearts of any whom God would not make sad, on the one hand, or, on the other, lest by any timid keeping back of the terrors of the Lord, we should be guilty of disloyalty to the majesty of eternal truth. Still, as against the danger of erring on the side of over-harshness, in the presentment of the subject, it seems sufficient to remember that, if there be any Scriptural representations of the last judgment, more awfully graphic and appalling than the rest,

they are those which proceeded from the lips of Christ Himself; from Him Whose sensitiveness and compassion, were more than human; from Him Who came not to destroy men's lives, nor yet to make them sad, but to redeem us from the power of the destroyer, and to save us with an everlasting salvation.

And why did the blessed Jesus dwell on such themes? Why, from lips ever full of the law of kindness, fell again and again, in all their bristling terrors, stern descriptions of the worm, and the fire, and the darkness, and the gnashing teeth? Oh! surely the design of this was none other than to prevail with those who listened to Him, to look at the future judgment on its other side, and see the spiritual glory of the righteous,—fellowship with angels, a seat on the throne, a sight of God. Jesus knows what is in man; and what ever will be in him:—knows that the bitterest ingredient, in the cup of undying anguish, will be the remembrance, by the impenitent sinner, of the salvation he has refused, and the grace he has resisted, and the calls he has disregarded,—the thought of the Saviour who besought him earnestly to accept forgiveness, and of the Spirit who strove with him mightily that he might repent and live. Oh! if echoes from the bright world can traverse the

uncrossed gulf, or distant glimmerings of the glory-land can mock the eyes of them that dwell in darkness, can we not imagine the lost soul beholding Jesus but not nigh, hearing Him from the heights of heaven, as once from the top of Olivet, and saying and weeping, "If thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."*

Ponder we deeply, therefore, that announcement of the old-world preacher, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints;" cometh with clouds to awe, cometh with trumpet-shout to awaken, cometh with crowns of glory to recompense, cometh with flaming fire to destroy. And all must have part in this pageant:—ourselves, our friends, all whom we love, and cling to, and pray for, and pray with. And then will follow separations. Life-ties may have to be severed. Dear friendships may have to be dissolved for ever. Bone of the same bone, and flesh of the same flesh shall be parted asunder. The harvest angel will put in his sickle, and the one shall be taken and the other left. How anxious should be the enquiry for each one of us,—where, what, on which side shall my place be, in the mighty and momentous

* Luke xix. 42.

classifications of that day. Multitudes, multitudes shall be assembled in the valley of decision,*— the disobedient, and the worldly, and the careless, and the impenitent on this side; the humble, the trusting, the Christ-loving, the poor in spirit on that side. And the two bands shall meet face to face,—meet for the last time. They shall part, and their parting will be for ever; each to go to his own place:—“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” †

* Joel iii. 14.

† Matt. xxv. 46.

XVIII.

The Glory of the Righteous.

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. xiii. 43.

“And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.”—Psa. xxxvii. 6.

SIDE by side with representations of the end of the ungodly in Scripture, we always have bright pictures of the glory of the righteous. The accounts of the doom awaiting the ungodly, especially as contained in the parable of the tares, must always be read with a chastened awe upon the spirit. The things which God has prepared, whether for them that love, or them that hate Him, are alike far above out of our sight. “Who knoweth the power of Thine anger?”* asks the Psalmist. But there is no answer to that question. Scripture gives forth its response,—such response as it sees fit to give,—in images of fire, and blackness, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. And we do not well to enquire further concerning this. All we know is, that, in

* Psa. xc. 11.

order to heighten our conceptions of the future world,—its recompenses for the evil, as well as its rewards for the good,—hell has its poetry of terror, even as heaven has its poetry of bliss. Both are inconceivable by us;—Tophet or Paradise; the lake that burneth, or the crystal sea; the portion of the ungodly, here represented as bound together and cast into a furnace of fire, or the portion of the righteous, concerning whom it is said: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

“*Then*,” observe:—that is, when every obscuring cloud has disappeared; when the darkness which overhung the present dispensation has passed away; when saints no longer look at spiritual objects through a glass darkly,—then shall the righteous shine forth,—not a little company, and not a hidden company, but a shining and multitudinous host, radiant as the brightness of the firmament, and, as much as the angels themselves, a part of the retinue of an enthroned and redeeming God.

In this sublime scene, observe the public vindication of the righteous in the presence of an assembled universe. They shine forth. They are acknowledged of God. Wisdom is justified of her children, who now take their rightful place at the

manifestation of the sons of God. It had not been always thus with the righteous, in this life. They were overlooked, or they were doubted, or they were evil spoken of. Show of reason for this there might be, in some cases. Together with the good seed of their regeneration, sown in their hearts, and even growing in them, the enemy had sown tares also;—the rank weeds of pride, and passion, and hastiness, and other besetting infirmities of a fallen nature. And these things are seen of men. The world has a keen eye for the tares;—for the failures and inconsistencies of the children of the kingdom. It sees the anger in Moses, and rebellious fretting in Job, and deceit and guile in Abraham, and, in David, depths of offending enough to make religion a very shame among men. It sees these, and that is all it does see. It sees nothing of the conflict, nothing of the inner strife, nothing of the midnight prayer, or the bed swimming with tears. And so with regard to many others, of whose character the world sees only the worst side. Yes, there will be a strange over-ruling of this world's blind judgments, at harvest time. Many a man will be gathered into the barn, whom we thought not to see there. Circumstances, temperament, outward disadvantages, obstructing influences, had put him

out of the pale of our charitable possibilities. And so we gave him up. But God had not given him up. His grace was working for him all through this thick obscure of outward difficulty and darkness, knowing how near was the time, when "his righteousness should shine forth as the light, and his judgment as the noonday."

Note again, the spiritual glory and perfectness of the righteous at this great manifestation. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun," it is declared;—as the sun in his strength; as the sun in his brightness; as the sun in his joyous mission to be a witness for the faithfulness and love of God. It will be a note of this glorious Epiphany, that then the righteous shall shine forth in their true light, as righteous. This can never be the case now. Any righteousness they may have, in the present state, though true as being "the righteousness which is of God by faith," yet is not a righteousness which shines. It is concealed by the imperfections of our being. It is impaired by our bodily frames and feelings. Our highest and holiest emotions are transient, and fitful, and mixed with much infirmity. In a little time, things seen and temporal resume their wonted sway over us, and we seem to be as earthly as the earthliest, and as cold as the coldest.

We look forward then to a manifestation,—to a shining out of that which, at present, is hidden, and obscure, and under a cloud. The gift of righteousness which is in us, cannot always make head against the sharp pains of lingering disease, or the tossings and frettings of a disappointed and weary life. The weakness of nature quenches or dims the struggling light of grace, until we almost doubt whether that light be in us at all. We are tempted to ask ourselves—‘Can this swerving will, and faint striving, and ready yielding, and frequent slumbering,—this constant going forward and falling back,—this nearness to Christ, and love to Christ, and joy in Christ, one day, followed by so much that is contrary to His mind, and Spirit, and blessed example the next,—can all this consist with our title to be considered as the good seed of the kingdom?’ Great searchings of heart have the righteous, on these accounts, as indeed they ought to have. For, amidst all these imperfections which they find within them,—these shadows of evil, gathering over their spiritual life,—there should always be found in them, something which is prophetic of a brighter time coming,—hopes, aspirations, yearnings, reachings forward after holier fellowships, which testify that there is in us a work of God; that we have the Spirit; that

soon these cleaving and inhering soils of a fleshly nature shall pass away; and that then "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Where, note once more, that this shining forth of the righteous, will be the shining forth of them in all their resurrection brightness; in the new creation and fashioning of their bodies like unto the glorious body of Christ their Saviour. Hence when Christ, "the first-born from the dead," appears in vision to John in Patmos, He is described by the same image as that here attributed to the righteous,—"His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."* Such a view of the spiritual glory of the righteous cannot be heightened. We are to be made like unto Christ, and to "see Him as He is." We shall shine as the sun. That body in which we had groaned, being burdened; in which we had often fainted and fallen back; in which we had been bowed down by care, and distraction, and spiritual deadness—by the warrings between flesh and spirit, and the imperious urgency of the worldly mind,—shall now be penetrated with the light of heaven, shall shine, and dazzle, and glisten, as did the form of the Holy One Himself on the Mount of

* Rev. i. 16.

Transfiguration,—every vestige of earthliness gone, and every cloud of ignorance rolled away. During our sojourn in the Paradise-world, there will have been accomplished in us all needful transmutations from corruption to incorruption; from weakness to power; from dishonour to glory. And the saints of God, each one in his own distinguishable splendour, shall take his place in the “brightness of the firmament,” to be “as the stars for ever and ever:”*—“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Such is the view which Scripture gives of the awaiting glory of the righteous. He stands in his lot. But it is a good lot, a sure lot, a covenant lot. He must rest till “the end of the days;” till the harvest at the end of the world; till the sabbath dawn of that everlasting week, when Christ and those who sleep in Him, shall ascend up in the clouds together; and the stones, rolled away from ten thousand graves, shall proclaim the glad Easter of the sons of God. Then shall we know even as we are known. Then shall all defect, and infirmity, and unworthiness, and fear of falling be taken away. Before the throne, shall be no cloud. On the risen spirit, shall be no mist of darkness. Among the saints of the New Jerusalem, there

* Dan. xii. 3.

shall be no night, because the "Lord shall be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended."* "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

* Isa. lx. 20.

XIX.

Christ glorified in His Saints.

“When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”—2 Thess. i. 10.

“On His head were many crowns.”—Rev. xix. 12.

“MANY CROWNS,” for we cannot doubt that Christ condescends to be glorified in the number of His saints; in the exceeding great army who shall rise and stand on their feet, when in the sepulchre, in the lowest depths of the sea, over plains of unburied dead shall be heard “the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.”* True we have it on the Highest authority, that though “many be called,” there are “few chosen.”† They were but few who entered the ark; but few righteous who were found in Sodom; but few who entered into the promised land; whilst, even to this day, and in Christian lands, as compared with the millions who profess the name of Christ, they are few of

* 1 Thess. iv. 16.

† Matt. xxii. 14.

whom we could speak, confidently, as converted children of God.

Still there is nothing in this fact to forbid that, in the end, Christ shall be glorified in the number of His saints. It is not ours to sum up the mighty aggregate now. Only in “the day of days” will it appear, the numbers He has drawn to His cross; the multitudes He has quickened from the death of sin; the shining hosts that will swell his trains, when He passes through the everlasting doors; the subject worlds that shall be gathered in “from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”* Oh! they are not few that shall be saved. How many shall be lost, may be an oppressive thought. But the saved, the sanctified, the “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God” shall still be a multitudinous band. John saw them a great company “which no man can number,” standing before the throne †—redeemed from every nation; elect from every church; gathered spoils from every sea. He listened to their loud alleluias as to the shouts of victory—the swelling chorus of the redeemed, both crowning and being crowned.

* Matt. viii. 11.

† Rev. vii. 9.

Again, in the sense of exalting Him in the estimation of the heavenly powers, Christ will be glorified in His saints, by reason of their innumerable diversities of age, and state, and character. How greatly will it magnify the grace and power of the Redeemer, in that day, to see men of every conceivable difference of outward circumstance, saved with a common salvation; justified by a common righteousness; sustained in life by one hope, and received, at death, into the one sanctuary of immortality. What marvel will it excite, to see in that “general assembly and church of the first-born,” men taken from every nation under heaven,—the swarthy Indian, the hardy Laplander, the wild Kaffir, the now-freed African slave,—all congregated to glorify Christ at that mighty gathering. And there shall be the polished Athenian who mocked at the sermon on Mars’ Hill.* And there the converted Sadducee who once said there was no resurrection.† There shall be humbled Pharisees, casting from them, with utter loathing, their once fancied righteousness; and there, with shame hardly yet extinguished, may be some who shouted their impieties at the Saviour’s cross. And all these will be eager to tell what cause they have to glorify Christ,—to magnify

* Acts xvii. 32.

† Acts xxiii. 8.

the grace that called, to exalt the love that pitied, to bless the arresting hand which was laid upon them, and the voice, which with all earnestness bade them flee from the wrath to come.

And in other saints, of a yet earlier age, will Christ be glorified also :—in Adam, in Abel, in Noah, in Abraham, and Daniel, and Job,—all having seen Him afar off, but now face to face. And angels, and spirits, and all the heavenly powers shall come together to this great sight :—shall be witnesses how the redeemed and saved of all time, bow the knee, and hymn the praise, and lay their crowns at the foot of the throne, crying with their one accord, and their one unconfounded speech :—“ Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty : just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.”*

But Christ will be glorified also in the adoring gratitude of His saints, as they remember in that day, all His gracious dealings with their souls. The manner of their first conversion, will be a matter of admiring wonder to many saints,—so unexpectedly was it brought about. How many like Matthew, like Zacchæus, like Paul, like the Philippian jailer will acknowledge with wondering gratitude in that day,—“ how did the Lord arrest

* Rev. xv. 3.

me in the midst of my thoughtless and irreligious career, at the time when I despised all warning, regarded no reproof, thought of no God, cared for no eternal world." Blind as we were, many of us shall confess we did not know our blindness. God brought us by a way which we knew not: sought us in a place where we expected not: called us at a time when we wished not. It was all direction which we could not see. Chance, that Gabriel of this lower world, led us to a place, or directed us to a companion, or formed for us an alliance, or placed us under a ministry, which caused that we came to know Christ. We were not seeking Him, but He was seeking us. We were labouring for the meat that perisheth, and He gave us meat from heaven. We had gone to fill our pitchers at the well of earthly delights: but He opened within us a well of water which was to spring up into everlasting life.*

Again, Christ will be admired of His saints, for the freeness and greatness of the pardons He has bestowed. Reviewing God's dealings with him at the close of life, David exclaimed, "I am as a wonder unto many." † And a wonder and miracle David is to this day:—a miracle of pardoning love, a miracle of restoring grace, a miracle of a stained,

* John iv. 14.

† Psa. lxxi. 7.

dark, crime-blackened soul, purged with the hyssop of a Saviour's merits, and washed with that blood which makes whiter than snow. And in that day, we shall be a wonder unto many, and a wonder unto angels, and a wonder unto ourselves. Many a timid, fearful, desponding Christian will wonder how his doubts were overcome, how his fears were taken away, how the great mountain of doubt and unbelief which kept him from the sight of God, was laid low. But now, in the twinkling of an eye, he is made to see all these infirmities as a dream of the past. That Saviour, coming in the clouds, has forgotten them all. Every sin, every neglect, every unkind doubt, every ungrateful fear disappears in the abyss of an everlasting oblivion; and, far beyond the reach of every assailing fear or foe, he stands in the presence of his Judge, a justified, pardoned, acquitted soul.

And, for the reach of His pardons towards their fellow-sinners, will the saints of Christ admire Him "in that day." One of the first things that will fix the admiring gaze of the saints on Christ at His coming, will be, to see how far beyond any conception of theirs, the grace and love of the Saviour have been exceeded:—exceeded in the case of this man whom they despised, and of that man whom they condemned: in the case of one, whom they

had taken no pains to teach, and of another, whom, for his incurable hardness of heart, they had left off making mention of in their prayers. Passing shame to ourselves, would there be in such meetings, were it not that we shall have blushed our last blush before that day. And we shall think only of the glory of that grace, to the praise of which it is that our lack of service was supplied ;— and that many, who should have had more of our love, and more of our care, and more of our faith, and more of our prayers, are permitted to join us in the triumphs of that glorious Advent, when they, as well as we, shall come to be “numbered with His saints in glory everlasting.”

Once more, Christ will be admired of His saints for the unchangeableness of His love towards them : and for the grace by which He enabled them to hold on their way to the end. To be converted is a miracle of grace; and to be pardoned is a miracle of love ; but to be “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation :” to triumph over unnumbered obstacles, and to survive the assaults of ten thousand foes ; to have all outward providences sanctified and blessed ; and to see wheel within wheel, and event within event, and trial within trial, all made to work together for our good,—this will be the wonder of all wonders, and

the silent admiration of eternity. Many, in that day, as they look back on their life's chequered history,—its lights and shadows, its bright spots and dark, its liftings up and its castings down,—will say within themselves, ‘How my soul was preserved safely through all this,—how I escaped that great danger, how I maintained my integrity in that fiery trial, how I was kept from rebellion under that fretting and wearing sickness, how breach upon breach, and wave upon wave of sorrow came upon me, without my fainting or falling away,—seems a marvel.’ It was a saying of George Whitfield, “Of all the wonderful things I shall see in heaven the greatest will be how I ever got there myself.”

But all will be made plain to us then. We shall see that in every thing which has befallen us, Christ designed to make us conquerors, and more than conquerors. And enemies, crosses, temptations, trials, were among the weapons by which He would get to Himself the victory:—insomuch that the undeparted thorn in the flesh; and the wrestlings with God in seemingly disregarded prayer; and the thwarted hope and the hindered usefulness, and the sick-chamber doubtings, and the death-bed fears,—all contributed to the purifying of that faith which is

more "precious than of gold that perisheth," and which thereby should "be found unto praise and honour and glory" * in that day, when Christ "shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

* 1 Pet. i. 7.

XX.

The Manifestation of Christ in Glory.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.”—Rev. i. 10, 11.

“I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—Rev. i. 18.

AMONG our anticipations of the second Advent, we give a prominent place to the manifestation of Christ in His ascended glory. A sublime foreshadowing of this is contained in the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation. We have there the first of the visions granted to the Apostle, and it was evidently designed to impress his mind at the outset, with a due sense of the glory, majesty, dominion, and power, which now belong to Him, Whom he had seen and known in the flesh. Words are multiplied to exhibit the risen Lord, in all the immutability of His perfections: His power infinite, His glory everlasting, His sovereignty unbounded over all worlds, all being, all time. “I am Alpha and Omega: I

am the beginning and the ending: I am the first and the last."

Look at the expressions, as they set forth the sovereignty of Christ over all the ages,—all the time that ever was, or ever shall be: The truth was no new truth to John, at least as far as the beginning was concerned. For he had declared it himself. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made."* But no less certain is the testimony of Scripture that Christ is the "Ending" as well as the Beginning. So the Apostle teaches. He has shewn to us that Christ Who created all things shall outlive all things: that being made by Him, they are made for Him; and, therefore, that when the end comes of all visible and material things,—when there shall be a crumbling of the rocks, and a bowing of the hills, and a falling of the stars, when the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,—then all these wrecks of things shall shed the light of their departing glory upon Christ, and do homage to Him Who is the First and the Last. "Thou Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of

* John i. 1-3.

the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thy hands: they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail." *

But in this vision, the universal sovereignty of Christ is declared to extend to all worlds and all existences: "I have the keys of hell and of death:" or as we read in the Revised Version, "I have the keys of Hades,"—that is, I rule over the realm of the invisible; I have dominion over that unseen world, whose "path no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen." † I have the lordship over regions, whose existence has never entered into the mind of man, and whose limits would transcend the reach of a seraph's thought. The compass of all being, created and uncreated, lies before me. Of darkness and light, of visible and invisible, of worlds known and unknown, I Jesus have "the keys."

Of course, in this claim to unlimited rule over the Hades world, there is included a reign over the penal hell. Still the aspect of this spiritual dominion most comforting to John, as to us, is that which exhibits the exalted Saviour as holding

* Heb. i. 11, 12.

† Job xxviii. 7.

in His hand the keys of the paradise-Hades; as guarding the waiting-room of the faithful dead; as opening the entrance to those tranquil abodes, where, with assured and longing hope, the saints of God, now in joy and felicity, are awaiting the presentments of the great day. The eye of faith had often seen Him with these keys:—seen Him standing, as it were, at the portals of light, ready to conduct the departing spirit in. The dying thief saw Him thus. The martyr Stephen saw Him thus. Yea, less distinctly, perhaps, and only afar off, holy David saw Him thus, when he felt that, without fear of evil, or danger of a lost path, he could thread the mazes of the dark valley of the shadow of death.* The Lord of that valley was with him in that night-gloom, “and in His hands are the keys of hell and of death.”

Of Hades, and of “death” also, it is added. This too describes one of the prerogatives of the risen Saviour. “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be the Lord both of the dead and living.”† All the outlets of our mortal being are under His control and keeping. He closes the gate of life. He opens the entrance to death. He bursts the barriers of the grave. He introduces to the palace of the Great King. And

* Psa. xxiii. 4. † Rom. xiv. 9.

these His acts are final acts,—resistless, settled, and irreversible. “He openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.”* We must regard the rule of Christ as absolute over all the passages which could lead from a seen to an unseen existence; as dominating, equally and alike, the opposite shores of time and eternity; as ordering the bounds and times of our habitation, in the world in which we live, and appointing the mansion which is to receive our spirit, when He gives the word to die. The view is intended to set forth the exact observation and note, which He, Who holds the keys, will assuredly take of every circumstance, connected with the hour or manner of a saint’s departure from life. No exit from this world opens out of itself. No gates are unlocked, at the bidding of second causes. No winged pestilence, or wasting element, or missile’s flight, can make use, at will, of the keys of hell and death. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”†

The departure of a soul from one world to another, is too important a matter to be under the ordering of any, but the Lord of life and immortality. The “Ancient of days” can alone determine the number of our days. And He

* Rev. iii. 7. † Psa. cxvi. 15.

does not turn the keys at random ; neither does He turn them blindfold. He appears in this vision, "with eyes like a flame of fire ;" that is, as One, before whose awful scrutiny are laid bare the secrets of all souls. And the eyes direct the hands. According as He sees one man abusing his spiritual opportunities, and another improving them ; one resisting His Holy Spirit, and another humbly seeking and waiting upon His guidance ; one presumptuously pledging the future to new and amended purposes, and another prayerfully redeeming the time while it is called 'To-day,' —does He turn the key, in anger, or in love. The key,—rather both keys, the keys, namely, of hell and of death. For He unlocks the doors of each, at the same instant of time. As the mortal pulse ceases to beat, the disembodied spirit passes into the separate state :—whether into that region of calm blessedness, where the redeemed of Christ are awaiting their final consummation and bliss, or to those condemned abodes, where the light is as darkness, and their very hope is but as despair.

Neither, once more, in this view of the prerogative of the keys in the hands of Christ, should we omit to see in it, a pledge that He will have regard to the manner of His people's departure hence,—

will see to it, that they shall have hope in their death, and that He may be glorified in their dying. Sustained and elevated triumphs, He promises not, even to the most advanced believer. They add nothing to a man's meetness for heaven. Whilst as to the Saviour Himself, it is easy to see how He gets more honour in the conflict, and the struggle, and the over-mastering faith of His dying servant; in the patient endurance of all the buffetings and assaults of the last hour; in the hardly earned victory over revived and accusing fears,—faith rising like a thing majestical, and saying, “Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him.” These are manifestations of the power of grace, by which Christ is magnified in our body, “whether it be by life or by death.”*

And by death, even more than by life. For these visions of the Revelation, bright, resplendent, glorious as they are,—of angels worshipping, of spirits glorified, of saints clothed in the righteousness of the Lamb, and of elders casting their crowns at His feet,—present nothing, in the way of support to the faith of the dying Christian, more comforting than that which reveals to him, as was revealed to John, a sight of the risen Saviour laying His right hand

* Phil. i. 20.

upon him, and saying, “Fear not ; I am the First and the Last ; I am He that liveth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death.”

XXI.

The Privileges of the Redeemed.

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads.”—Rev. xiv. 1.

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”—Rev. v. 13.

FROM a vision of the Redeemer in His uncreated glory, the Apostle is permitted to look upon a vision, setting forth the glory of the redeemed, standing, with their glorified Lord, on the mount Sion in heaven.

In this vision, our attention is first arrested by the title under which Christ, the supreme object of the heavenly worship, is designated. “And I looked, and, lo, a LAMB stood on the mount Sion:” better rendered in our revised version, with the definite prefix,—I looked, and lo, “the Lamb” stood on mount Sion. In this connection, the title is peculiar to this book, where it occurs upwards of twenty times. It is significant, as shewing how large

a place in the Apostle's visions of the heavenly world, as well as of the kind of worship which finds acceptance there, is the great doctrine of propitiation,—the Lamb being the ordained medium of acceptable service, not for redeemed, and once sinful men only, but for all orders of heavenly intelligences who serve, or wait before the throne. The fact comes out very strikingly in the first vision of the Lamb, which we find recorded in this book, where we read: “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.”* In the vision here vouchsafed to the Apostle, we observe how the high and heavenly dignity of the redeemed is set forth:—“I saw them,” says the Apostle, one hundred and forty-four thousand of them, “having His Father's name written in their foreheads.”

This name on the forehead describes that outward and visible sign on the countenance, by which all the angels of God know the redeemed, and by which the redeemed know each other. The angels know them by that forehead writing. At the end of the world, when the work of ruin is to be begun on all material things, we see how an arresting hold is laid upon the hand of the destroyer; “Hurt not

* Rev. v. 6.

the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."* And as they are known to the angels, so are these sealed ones known to themselves and to each other. All these hundred and forty-four thousands, having the incommutable Name on their foreheads, feel a holy security in themselves, as the ransomed and redeemed of God. As they walk through the streets of the New Jerusalem, each sees, on the brow of the other, the ensign and badge of heavenly citizenship; the passport of their admission to that temple from which "they shall go no more out;" a pledge of the eternal fidelity of Him, of Whom it is written that "whom He loveth He loveth unto the end."

Observe next, with regard to these saints on the mount, that they are declared to be emancipated from all earthly and corrupting influences. They are described as "those which were redeemed from the earth;" "being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb." Of course, there is a sense, in which the children of God are redeemed here;—being bought with a price, a price of infinite preciousness, covenanted for, and virtually paid down, for our ransom, before the world was. Still

* Rev. vii. 3.

we do not enter upon the full benefits of this redemption in the present state. As the Apostle says, "we wait for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." * Then are we redeemed from the earth;—redeemed from its vexatious and galling yoke; redeemed from its depressing and enslaving power; redeemed from idol-worship, and all the tyrannies of the carnal mind. Very strikingly is this identifying of a perfect adoption with a perfect redemption set forth in a passage in Isaiah:—"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." †

Note next, the employments of the redeemed ones. Of these the first is praise. "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the living creatures, and before the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand." ‡ This brings out the prominent characteristic of the worship of the heavenly world, as distinguished from the worship of earth. On earth, our chief exercise in worship is prayer:—prayer for forgiveness, prayer for help, prayer for mercy, prayer for grace to serve, prayer for a heart to love. Hence, prayer implies a

* Rom. viii. 23.

† Isa. xliv. 1.

‡ Rev. xiv. 3.

condition of guilt, and want, and suffering, of spiritual weakness, and the fear or danger of falling away. It is emphatically the sacrifice of lapsed and ruined natures; and, until the answer of peace comes, there can be, in the exercise itself, no elevation, and no joy.

In the heavenly worship, on the contrary, the offerings put up before the throne consist not of prayer, but praise,—praise, and nothing else. All the themes, on which saints' hearts are engaged, are gladdening themes. They think of love and goodness; of wisdom and majesty; of all the perfections of godhead, employed and exerted on their behalf:—consulting for them; ordering for them; day by day making them more and more meet for the angels' society, and for the angels' home. Songs of praise, we may believe, formed the only litany of Paradise, and a eucharist of eternal joy will be the standing solemnity of heaven. There, where crowns are cast before the throne; where the alleluias are poured forth as the deep roll of many waters; and the sea of glass echoes back the soft music of the harps of God,—praise and adoration culminate. The song is new, because the faculties of those who rehearse it are new. Amid the world-noise of the earthly Babylon, their dulled senses could not

learn the heavenly anthem, neither were their hearts tuned to such lofty melody. It was "the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb."

The last noticeable feature in this representation of the saints is their cheerful alacrity of service. In the fourth verse we read of them: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." This perhaps is what we should expect. It was what they desired to do, when they were on earth. But it was too often an unaccomplished desire. Life was full of conflicting duties, clashing interests, paths so intricate, and involved, and doubtful, that it was often difficult to determine which they should avoid, and which they should choose. Hence the infirmity of mistaken choice, and the allowed preponderance of inferior motives, the deceived heart following the bias of its own wayward wishes, when it ought to have followed only in the example and foot-prints of the Lamb. But, in heaven, the perpetual presence of that Lamb preserves them from all deviations and all mistakes. Their eye is never off Him, nor His off them. They follow Him through the palaces of the eternal city. They stand with Him on the surface of the crystal sea. They behold Him as He comes to take the book out of the right hand

of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to loosen the seven seals thereof. Yes; to be near Christ, is heaven; and to obey Christ, is rest. The exact nature of the heavenly service we may not know, but the happiness of it will certainly be this,—that it is the service to which He appoints us. He Who was Israel's directing fire-cloud, will be the saint's guiding star. Way of their own they have none, nor thought of choice. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

Such is the Apostle's vision of those who were redeemed from the earth, in their glorious estate and dignity; in their everlasting security from all evil; in their joyous and unfaltering service. New as these attributes of the heavenly state may be in degree, and in the height and glory of their consummation, they should not be new to a believer in Christ Jesus, in their essential characteristics. Earth should be as heaven, in regard to the spiritual lineaments of a saint of God,—whether he be still doing battle with the evil, that is in the world, or joining in the higher service, with the angels before the throne. In going up higher, he changes his place, but not his liege Lord; the faculties he brings to his service, but not the object of his desire and trust and love.

No: if he is to be hereafter one of the redeemed, his whole life on earth will be but as a rehearsal, and shadow of things to come. Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, he will feel to have the Father's name written in his forehead. Giving himself to works of faith, and labours of love, he will feel as if anticipating the employments of those emissaries of light, who are sent out continually on the errands of the Almighty: whilst as to the "new song,"—new though it be, in regard to the loftiness of its strain, yet with regard to its theme, its burden, its glorious and everlasting refrain,—it will be the same with that, which, in broken and feeble accents, he had ever tried to chant with earthly lips:—"Salvation to Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever."

XXII.

The Worship of the Heavenly State.

“Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.”—Rev. vii. 15.

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”—Rev. xxi. 22.

WE are not to conclude from the Apostle seeing no temple in heaven, that there will be no worship there. So far otherwise, it is clear from other parts of the vision, that worship will be the outstanding characteristic of the heavenly world, as well as its unceasing and beatific employment. Only we must not fail to observe of what kind this worship is. It is not, as intimated in our last Meditation, the worship of *prayer*, seeing that every desire of the immortal spirit being satisfied to the uttermost, we shall have nothing to pray for. But though we may not pray, we shall worship, we shall serve, we shall praise, we shall adore. Through some medium or faculty of the risen spirit, which, as yet, we know not of, we shall, without a material temple, do something of temple service. Waiting at the altar of the

Holy One; swelling the columns of ascending incense, delighting to sing of the triumphs of our ransomed nature, and celebrate the perfections of an infinite God. "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." *

Moreover, of this worship we are taught that it is constant, unintermittent, without fainting and without pause: "They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night." "Day and night;" for with glorified natures, we may believe, service never loses its delight, nor obedience its own self-supplied reward. Satiety is an infirmity of earth, an accident of our lapsed humanity. Good spirits never tire of goodness: but find, in the recurring cycle of the heavenly employments, attractions ever immortal, and ever new.

We learn further, with regard to this worship of heaven, that there will be connected with it, clearer and fuller manifestations of the Divine glory. "And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened." † To the Jew of old time, the temple was associated with the most hallowed forms of

* Rev. xv. 3.

† Rev. xv. 5.

spiritual delight, as bringing him, by means of its services, so very near to God. The tabernacle he knew to be an emblem of heaven. All its appointments were framed after the patterns of heavenly things,—bold material types, as if meant to stimulate the reverent imagination of his spiritual childhood, but, to the practised eye of faith and true devotion, signs and shadows of good things to come,—signs, eloquent in their dumbness, and shadows, bright in all their clouds. See this in the case of David. His appreciation of the symbolic teaching of the visible temple, was a cultivated spiritual faculty. His soul fed on it. “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts.”* And again: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple.”† Here the temple is loved for what it reveals,—for the spiritual presence which abides in it, and fills it. And heaven itself, would be no heaven to us, if that Presence were taken away.

But it shall not be taken away. It shall only be unconfined by any local limits; unre-

* Psa. lxv. 4.

† Psa. xxvii. 4.

stricted to any spot between the cherubims ; whilst it shall fill with impressive tokens of its majesty, the illimitable realms of the heavenly world, and diffuse, through all the mansions of the redeemed, the light of the glory of God. The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony, in heaven, will differ widely, in some particulars, from the earthly structure. Distinctions between one court and another, as in the ancient temple, between worship in this mountain or the prescriptive sanctities of some heavenly Jerusalem, will all have disappeared. All heaven will be as a mount of transfiguration. The same outshining and manifested glory will be visible everywhere. The presence of God and of the Lamb will constitute a universal temple, every one that overcometh being made a pillar of it, and the blood-bought family of earth the priests that serve. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men : and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God.”* Thus the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony is the temple of the glory that shall be revealed ; the Shekinah of Him Who was manifest in the flesh ; the now enthroned, worshipped, glorified “Emmanuel God with us.”

* Rev. xxi. 3.

But consider some negative aspects of the heavenly worship, and its service, as suggested by the words:—"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."*

Of this language the plain meaning is, that the blessings which we chiefly look for and most prize in the earthly temple, will be supplied by the presence of God and of the Lamb. Now that which we look to receive in the visible temple, here on earth, and for which we love it, is refreshment and strength, teaching and light, joy and peace, and these coming to us through certain outward signs and ordinances,—especially the two golden pipes of God's Holy Word and Sacraments, emptying golden oil out of themselves, in order to nourish and maintain the soul's life of God's elect. The Apostle is here taught that, in the heavenly temple, these outward accessories of worship are not:—are not, because they are not necessary. The word of Scripture is of use only as it testifies of Christ. Holy Sacraments are of value, only as they unite us to Christ. The very temple is nothing to us, but as it is filled with the presence of Christ. What need have we of shadows, when He Whom they all point to, and prefigure, and

* Rev. xxi. 22.

terminate in, is seen by us face to face? "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

Greatly should it enhance our view of the glory of the upper temple, that, in its service, we shall be able to dispense with sacraments. In the earthly temple these have had, and still have their use. In the old time, they were the great educators of the Church; parables, and lesson-books to the children of faith, whereby men were kept continually mindful of the coming day of Christ. And to us, of this day, these sacraments have an unspeakable preciousness. We love our Paschal Feast. We reverence our holy Font. They have been made to us means of grace; and have foreshadowed, not dimly, our hopes of glory. But when our souls have been made white in the blood of the Lamb; when we have put on the fine linen which is the righteousness of saints; when we stand with the Lamb on the mount, or harp with the harpers on the sea of glass, we shall have put away the childish things of the lower-world worship,—the wood, hay, and stubble of the material temple, in order that, in the temple not made with hands, we may offer up spiritual worship to the spiritual and invisible God.

And, once more, does it not magnify incon-

ceivably the glory of the heavenly temple, that, by reason of its diffused spiritual shining, even the sacred volume itself may be dispensed with? We may take up the holy Book again. And, as we do, no doubt, we shall see new meaning in its obscure things, and a more effulgent glory in its bright things. But of a Bible, as a lamp to our feet; of a Bible, as the teacher of heavenly wisdom; of the Word, as the sword of the Spirit, to resist evil, or as the solace of sorrowing and bleeding hearts,—we shall know nothing. No; as the Apostle teaches, “whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” The veil will be lifted up. “That which is in part, shall be done away.” We shall stand within the encircling radiance of the uncreated glory, and in that light we shall see light. We shall see truth as it is; worship as it is; heaven as it is; in a word we shall see Christ as He is. And this will supersede the need of all ordinances, all sacraments, all written revelations, all temples save that spiritual and invisible tabernacle of which the light, the glory, the all-filling presence is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

“The Lamb:”—for again, as in the other visions of the Apocalypse, do we recognize this outstanding

feature of all glorified worship. It heightens our anticipations of the heavenly world to feel, that He Who, on earth was the life and strength of all our worship—our altar to partake of, our prophet to instruct, our priest to bless, our sacrifice to bleed and die,—will, in heaven, be the living centre of everlasting homage, and the glory of that temple, in which Cherubim and Seraphim continually do bow.

And we shall look upon Him, and hold awful converse with Him, and be made like unto Him. Look where we will, we shall behold Him. Turn where we will, He will be nigh. His presence will make heaven, and all for which heaven is desired. The light unapproachable is Christ. The living fountain of waters is Christ. Christ is Himself the tabernacle of the testimony which was seen in heaven, and Christ is that “tree of life which stands in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Hence the Lamb, as the Lamb, is made the beginning and ending of worship to all beings, and all worlds. One is the angels’ hymn of praise, and one is ours. Led by the heavenly choirs, the new song peals through the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem: and the echo is caught up by all the living things in the earth and in the sea:—“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the

earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” *

* Rev. v. 13.

XXIII.

Preparedness for the Lord's Coming.

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning ; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding.”—Luke xii. 35, 36.

“Behold, the bridegroom cometh.”—Matt. xxv. 6.

“Therefore be ye also ready : for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”—Matt. xxiv. 44.

To be on our guard against a condition of spiritual slumber is a standing Advent lesson. “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night,”* the Apostle warns us, whilst to point out the perilous consequences of unwatchfulness is the substance and stress of our Lord’s parable of the Ten Virgins. “And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him.”† “At midnight,”—when the tired world is asleep ; when a dead stillness pervades all nature,—then it was, that these virgins were startled from their slumbers. The expression is introduced, no doubt, to heighten our anticipations

* 1 Thess. v. 2. † Matt. xxv. 6.

of the Saviour's second coming to judge the world. It will be not necessarily in the literal midnight, but in the midnight of thoughtlessness, and sloth, and spiritual death ; when men are buying and selling, projecting and planning, slumbering by unfed lamps, or sleeping in the lap of worldliness and sin,—that a voice shall be heard, penetrating to the most ancient grave and to the deepest sea, saying, “Behold, He cometh,”—cometh not in incarnate lowliness, not in purple scorn, not in derisive majesty, not in wounds and scars,—but clothed with light as a garment, and enthroned in the clouds of heaven. And there will be “a cry” made. The expression, as applied to the case of the parable, indicates the noise, and the shouting, and the running before of the multitudes, which usually attend the near approach of some great one. But here it is the King of kings, and Lord of lords that is approaching. Sleeping or waking, to all is the cry made, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh.”

But apart from the direct application of the words to the circumstances of the second Advent, let us look at the parable of the Ten Virgins, as it sets forth the conduct of men,—be they wise or be they unwise,—who when grievous sickness is upon them are told the hour is come for their near

meeting with Christ:—"Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps." The effectual trimming of the lamp consisted of two parts,—the infusion of fresh oil, and the removal of any accretions which had gathered round, and were clogging the wick,—the latter precaution being so important, that a small instrument for the purpose, attached by a slender chain, formed part of the ordinary equipment of the lamp. We might almost think that our Church had in view this two-fold trimming of the Christian lamp, when, in her office of ministration to the sick and dying, she bids us pray for the sick man,—"Renew in him, most loving Father, whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by his carnal will and frailness," that is, infuse into him fresh oil. And then afterwards bids us pray, that "whatever defilements the soul may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world, being purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before Thee."

At all events, the point for notice is that, on the announcement of the Bridegroom's near coming, men, whether wise or foolish, instinctively set about trimming their lamps. Even to a good man, the dying time is a lamp-trimming time. He cannot help feeling that many things have

become decayed through unwatchfulness, through infirmity, through what the Church calls his "carnal will and frailness." His shield of faith has become sorely bruised. His once firm grasp of the promises is weakened. He has not the power to prevail with God in prayer which he once had, and his helmet of hope suffices not to cover his head in the day of battle. He feels to want more strength, more life, more of the anointing of the Holy One. His lamp burns not brightly,—at least not brightly enough for an assured and happy meeting with the Bridegroom.

Still, in his case, the oil is ready; and, in the sharpness of his sufferings and pains, an instrument is ready for purging away any remainders of earthliness and defilement, which, in the lapse of years, may have gathered round his lamp, and made the flame fitful and unsteady. And now he can arise and go forth. His last hours are spent in reviewing mercies, in gathering up tokens, in reviewing and sealing afresh his interest in the covenant, in throwing off and disencumbering himself of his last earthly care, in bracing up his spirit for looking at death calmly and without fear, in glorifying Christ, by witnessing to the sufficiency of His grace, and thus letting those around him see how a Christian dies. His lamp is trimmed.

With others, however, as with the procrastinating servants our Lord speaks of, in another parable, there is not found this spiritual readiness. And their sad experience admonishes us of the folly of delayed repentance, postponed resolves, the putting off the momentous concerns of our salvation from day to day. Foolish as were those negligent virgins in the parable, their folly never went the length of supposing that a lamp would continue burning without oil, or that however long he might tarry, the Bridegroom would not be sure to come at last. To what then are we to attribute their infatuated negligence? Manifestly to the fact that they were living on good intentions; staking their immortality on the chance that the Bridegroom might not come yet, and that, when He did come, His approach would be with observation,—so measured, and slow, and gradual, as to allow of their getting oil for their lamps, even if provision for it had been delayed to the moment of His setting out.

They were out in their reckoning in this, as, in like case, any of us may be. But the folly of such conduct apart, let us look at its heaven-offendingness. Is it not like telling the Infinite God that He has required us to give our whole life to a work, which we can do in far less time? Is it not

a deliberate proposal to give unto our God and Saviour, the worst and most useless of our days, while we spend on self and sin the best? In a word, is it not as if we would offer, at the shrine of the god of this world, our manhood, our vigour, our freshness, our strength, and were content to lay, on the altar of the Holy One, an offering of weakness, and decay, and old age, and mental feebleness? Oh! stand we in awe of these perilous and God-insulting delays. But now, "while it is called to-day,"—now, while for a season the Bridegroom tarries, let us arise and be getting ready. Let us stand with our lamps burning, and our loins girded, and our feet sandalled, and our staff in hand,—ever "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God," and laying our ear to the ground that we may catch the first syllables of that midnight cry,—"Behold, the bridegroom cometh."

"Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." So spake the Great Teacher at the close of this solemn discourse. And the warning may be taken as pointing the moral of all our Advent teachings, namely, the duty of vigilance, readiness, preparedness for brief warning-notes, and a sudden severance from all earthly things. The habit

should be formed in us of looking at things, as we shall look at them in that day, when the Bridegroom shall open the everlasting doors, and they who are ready shall go in with Him. And we would be ready,—ready with a joyous readiness,—such as when Jacob interrupted his last prophetic utterances to exclaim, “I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord;”* or when Simeon, having seen the one sight he had ever cared to see, said, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation;”† or as when Paul, girding up his loins for the last time, and uttering aloud his last leave-taking of this present world, said, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.”‡ We would not die hurriedly. We would have everything ready; our faith ready, our hope ready, all earthly things disposed of, as orderly as were the linen clothes and the napkin, in the Saviour’s forsaken grave:—nothing to wait for but the last summons, and when that comes, and one saith, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh,” we shall have our answer ready also,—“Even so, come Lord Jesus.”§

And this posture of spiritual readiness we would the more cultivate because we “know not the day nor

* Gen. xlix. 18. † Luke ii. 29. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 6.

§ Rev. xxii. 20.

the hour when the Son of man cometh." Know not, and do not seek to know. "My times are in Thy hands,"* said the Psalmist. And who would wish to have them in any other hands? No: we would keep our ear open to signs and warnings. We would not see this friend and that drop out from life's activities, without saying, 'what meaneth this to us?' We would not see indications of life's rapidly contracting hand-breadth,—this taste and that changing, and one thing after another given up, without saying to ourselves 'what meaneth this to us?' For all these things have a voice. They tell us of Advent possibilities. They admonish us to cultivate an Advent spirit. They bid us see in each departing year, a nearer approach to the Advent crisis,—whether that of the Saviour's personal coming to us, or of His sending His death-angel to bring us to Him. And this is the burden of what they all say to us,— "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

* Psa. xxxi. 15.

XXIV.

The Rest of the Intermediate State.

“But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—Dan. xii. 13.

“He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”—Isa. lvii. 2.

“MAN giveth up the ghost and where is he?”* was the question of the patriarch Job, and he could find no answer to his own question. A deep sleep,—a parenthesis of inactive, if not unconscious, being was the only forecast he could venture upon as the immediate sequence upon death. “As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: so man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”† How much brighter is the hope of David: “And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest:”‡ or still more that voice from heaven in the Revelation,—“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from hence-

* Job xiv. 10. † Job xiv. 11, 12. ‡ Psa. lv. 6.

forth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours." *

These passages, together with those at the head of this Meditation, are plainly in favour of the view of a real, though not perfect state of happiness, as intermediate between death and the resurrection. The "rest" of Daniel, which is to ensue immediately on his dismissal from the body, is clearly distinguishable from the "lot," which he is to receive at the end of the days. What is the rest which is here promised to the prophet? Well, first, it is manifestly a conscious rest, as distinguished from a condition of suspended existence. It is not rest to cease to be; neither could we say that they who "died in the Lord" were "blessed," in their portion, if this portion consisted in a temporarily extinguished being. How the dead rest,—with what new faculties they are endowed,—to what extent any who, only in a very imperfect sense, could be said to have died in the faith of Christ, may attain to greater meetness for the inheritance of the saints, before the resurrection,—of this we know nothing. We leave it among the secret things which belong to the Lord our God.

As to the fact, however, that the spirit of the departed is in a state of consciousness, immediately

* Rev. xiv. 13.

after death, a believer in Revelation can have no doubt. If the penitent was to be, on the very day of his crucifixion, with Christ "in Paradise;" if the Apostle knew that, when his martyr's sufferings were over, he should be "present with the Lord;" if Lazarus, in parable, is represented as passing from the rich man's gate to the calm repose of "Abraham's bosom," it is evident that there is no break in the continuity of a saint's existence. Die when he may, or die how he may, he lives on, not in the fullness of beatific bliss, for that, Daniel was not taught to look for till "the end of the days;" but still in a condition of holy security, of tranquil expectation, of calm repose from the struggles, labours, fears, and vicissitudes of his earthly lot.

And how much is there to comfort the heart of the Christian, in this anticipated sabbath of the Paradise world? Especially the aged Christian. He "would not live always." He sighs for rest. He longs for his discharge. He will fight on so long as it pleaseth Him "Who hath called him to be a soldier." But to know that his great adversary has done with him;—that the foe who had, of a long time, assailed him in the world, distracted him in the Church, shared, and marred, and poisoned all his hours of solitude,

had fallen finally,—this must be a welcome rest to the tried and tempted spirit. He listens to the words of the dismissing angel as an assurance, that, in the unseen world into which he is passing, he shall neither faint, nor fear, relax nor tire, falter nor fall again. “Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest.”

Not that, in this view of the perfect rest of the intermediate state, we are supposed to pronounce against all possible developments of character. So long as we exclude, from our views of that state, all idea of *probation*,—thereby making its issues uncertain; and all idea of *penalty*, thereby implying that a portion of the debt of sin remains still unpaid,—there is nothing, in Scripture, to forbid our acceptance of that all but universal persuasion of the early Church, that the intermediate state is one of preparation, of progressive purifying, of a sanctifying, and ever ripening meetness for the yet nobler inheritance which awaits the children of light. In our Burial service, we are taught that they who “depart hence in the Lord” are, from that instant, “in joy and felicity,”—never thence-forward can have experience of anything else. And yet, as the same service teaches, are they not already perfect; but are awaiting the close of the Paradise-state, or

ever they attain to their “perfect consummation and bliss.”

The view is, at least, in accordance with that pervading supposition of the Apostolic writings, that the believer in Christ does not attain to his maturity of spiritual growth, until the day of the resurrection; that the work begun in life, does not stop at death, but goes on by progressive stages,—the path of the justified soul “shining more and more unto the perfect day.” Thus, writing to the Philippians, we have the Apostle saying: “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* “Until,” not “at,” plainly implying that death makes no interruption of the continuity. It seems inconceivable that the soul, after being “delivered from the burden of the flesh” should not attain to higher degrees of illumination, than it had ever reached in this ever-burdened life; especially since the only one of our race who could tell us anything about the experiences of the Paradise world, represents it as a place full of “visions and revelations of the Lord.”†

In what way this view of the intermediate state, as a condition of progressive advancement in

* Phil. i. 6. *ἀχρις.*

† 2 Cor. xii. 1.

knowledge, in sanctity, in beatific hope, may be related to the case of the countless millions of Christians, who live and die with a very imperfect knowledge of Christ, or the workings of His Spirit,—amiable and beautiful negations, it may be, of all that is distinctive of the spiritual character, or the spiritual life,—it becomes us to speak with reverent and solemn reserve. “We nothing know.” For any essential change of moral character after death, we have not the slightest warrant in Scripture. We cannot go beyond the word of the Lord our God, to say less or more: and according to that word, whatever the merciful possibilities of the intermediate state, they belong to none but to those who “die in the Lord.”

“Who die in the Lord,”—a limit absolute in itself, but, relatively to our human knowledge, impalpable, indefinite, shrouded in impenetrable mist. For, to be able to say of any fellow Christian that he did *not* die in the Lord, or could not so have died,—who of all the sons of men could lay claim to this? Oh! no. To map out a region, lying outside the boundary line of the Saviour’s “uttermost;” to draw a circle, within whose sharp circumference alone, the mercies of the Infinite God can take effect; to look upon a spirit, just

passing into the world unseen, and say, 'Here is one whom infinite love could never pity, infinite mercy could never pardon, infinite blood could never cleanse, infinite grace could never restore,'—this be far from us. Our commission, to our fellow-sinners, is to utter everywhere the words of infinite, world-wide, illimitable hope,—to utter them in the ears of those, in whom, some would say, there is not "a hope to hang a hope upon." Pastoral experience of the unrealness of a sick-bed repentance, as well as its extreme rareness, may make us shrink, if only for the sake of survivors, from expressing all the hope we feel. But, to the last, utter despair finds no place in our creed. We see hope, in the eyes uplifted to heaven; hope, in the sigh which grieves that it cannot grieve more; hope, in the scarcely audible utterance of the sacred Name; hope, in the tear which bewails a misused and wasted past; and, seeing these, we ask, who, of all the companies of heaven, or of all the creeds and schools of earth, shall forbid us to say to the dying one: "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope, even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee" *—double for all thy sins.

* Zech. ix. 12.

XXV.

The Risen Body.

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.”—Phil. iii. 21.

“And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”—1 Cor. xv. 49.

THE resurrection of the body is a distinctive feature of the Christian theology. Philosophical or popular, we find it in no pagan creed. That mind is immortal; that the soul contains within itself an imperishable and undying principle; that when a man has shuffled off this mortal coil, he will, in some new and altered condition of existence, live, and feel, and think, and act again,—even the heathen mind could get as far as this. But there its speculations stopped. Hence, when discoursing to the polished Athenians, on Mars’ Hill, the Apostle preached of the resurrection of the dead, we read “some mocked.”* They were believers only in a one-sided immortality. The breath of life might re-animate one part of our

* Acts xvii. 32.

human nature, when a man died, but the rest must be left a prey to annihilation, as a thing that had never been. The tenet was a welcome one, therefore, to the ordinary intelligence, which supplied the missing link, in this mutilated and disjointed creed ; which taught that, in a perfect resurrection, an immortal body would be joined on to an immortal mind ; that all grave-dust is living dust ; that every atom of corruption shall put on incorruption,—and, being quickened together with Christ, shall rise to meet the Lord in the air.

Still that old form of Corinthian scepticism will constantly obtrude itself. “How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come ?”* To which, for all practical purposes it may suffice to quote the passage from the Philippians which, adopting the Revised Version, runs, “Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.” Here the expressions used, while keeping clear of anything like the destruction of the original bodily particles, point to such an entire re-creation or re-constitution of them, as that all vestige of the former likeness is supposed to be gone. The dust, while losing nothing of its proper identity, goes down to the earth one thing, and comes up another.

* 1 Cor. xv. 35.

Nothing can more emphatically mark the entireness of the change, than the account given of it by the Apostle, in the fifteenth chapter to the Corinthians :—he says “it is sown in corruption: it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour: it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness: it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body.”* And all this without prejudice to the material identity of the thing sown.

A hard thing to understand, some will say. Not at all, argues the Apostle, any more than it is a hard thing to understand, in the processes of vegetation, how when a man casts a bare grain into the ground,—“it may chance of wheat or of some other grain,”—it comes up with some other body, such as God is pleased to give it; and yet no one doubts its being one and the same seed, which the man first cast into the earth. So also with the resurrection of the dead. Let personal identity consist in what it may, it certainly does not depend upon the sameness of the corporeal particles which make up “our vile body.” These, as we know, even during life, are in a constant state of waste, and flux, and mutation. And yet the identity of the conscious, thinking, intelligent

* 1 Cor. xv. 43, 44.

principle has been no more affected by this metamorphosis of body, than if it had been a mere change of garments.

In like manner, we may reason of the resurrection of the body. The actual substance, laid in the grave, may be separated into a myriad atoms, and each of these, coalescing with others, may become incorporated into a myriad different forms. And yet all this hinders not that, when again gathered into one, and each united to its proper sentient and immortal principle, the risen person should not feel that his body is the same body, and that he is the same man. The changes that will have come over our bodies are but accidents from without,—the super-clothing of that immortal investiture, with which, on rising from the grave, the saints of God shall appear to meet their returning Lord. The incorruption, the glory, the power, the new spiritual organization are all parts of the glorified attire which has been in process of working for them in the grave-world, while they have been waiting for the coming of “the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ;” “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.”

But note another aspect of this resurrection change, or the assimilation of our risen bodies to the glorified body of the Lord. "That it may be conformed to the body of His glory"—is the Revised Version of the passage in the Philippians. The body of His "glory," observe, not the body of His humanity,—as born of Mary, as tabernacling for a season in the flesh, as lifted up, in shame, upon the cross, nor even as seen by a few chosen witnesses after His resurrection. The conformity is to be, in some sense, to the body of His glory as He appears now, in the midst of the throned hierarchies of heaven, all its worshipping intelligences bowing with veiled adorations at His feet. Very faint must be any conceptions we could form of such a body; and, as in the case of all conjectures about the heavenly state, we can get very little beyond negations.

Thus, for instance, we may believe there will be nothing of visible deformity in the Christ-fashioned body. Often is this to be seen in His people now. Inherited unsightliness from birth, irritating thorns in the flesh, scars and disfigurements from disease and accidents, evil expressions lined deeply on the countenance,—signs of inborn passions, or it may even be of indulged sin,—these cannot be hidden in the present state. But they will all have

disappeared from the redeemed and risen body. Conformed to the glorious body of Christ, there will not be one of the resurrection throng, without the heavenly grace of form and comeliness. The bodies of the saints will be all perfect; while the countenance will yield to the impressions of the hallowed spirit, beaming with love and brightness, and reflecting, in its every look, the pure surroundings of a beautiful and sinless world.

This conformity to the glorious body of Christ, will appear further, in the utter extinction and elimination within us, of all the inferior desires and appetites,—fruitful source, as these are, while we are in the body, of so much sorrow, and so much sin. But the resurrection body will hunger no more, and thirst no more. Appetencies, of other kinds, it may have, and “the Lamb, in the midst of the throne will feed them;” whilst the living fountains of waters will slake every thirst of the immortal nature, whatever its desires may be.* And the purest affections of the earthly state, these, though revived, will exist only in more perfect form. It will be with a new and heavenly love that the mother will still love her sucking child. Marriage itself, holy and sanctified as it is, as an emblem of the mystical union which is

* Rev. vii. 17.

betwixt Christ and His Church, will not be pure enough for heaven, and must see its love absorbed into a higher affection,—the love of the infinite, and the immortal, and the Divine: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”*

Once more, it will be an attribute of the glorified and risen body, that it will never, as on earth, be a clog upon our aspirations and fervour in the Divine service. The spiritual clothing which our material bodies shall put on will be, not a hindrance to us, but a help, in doing work for God. No weakness, no languor, no satiety will impair or slacken the energies of the deathless spirit. We shall move without weariness. We shall think without exhaustion. We shall serve without decay of love; and without intermission, or restraint, or pause, shall worship day and night before the throne. And to all this, the immediate introduction will be the descent of the Lord from heaven, calling, to the dead in Christ, “Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”†

And “in sure and certain hope” we wait for this. We commemorate our earthly Easters with joy and

* Matt. xxii. 30. † Isa. xxvi. 19.

gladness. They tell of a risen and ever-reigning Lord. They tell of a sealed and accomplished victory over all the enemies of our salvation. They tell us, with regard to our dear ones that now sleep in dust, that they shall awake and behold the face of their Lord in righteousness. But the Great Easter is yet to come. And we desire to be looking for it, and waiting for it, and getting ready for it. We must fight the fight of faith with the King of Terrors, as other saints have fought. We must go down to "the house appointed for all living," as they have gone. But we shall be there only as "prisoners of hope." ONE, having the keys of hell and death, will soon bring us our release. One more proof of His mighty working must be exhibited before all worlds, and then shall the last enemy be destroyed, which is death. "We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

XXVI.

The Enlargement of the Mental Faculties.

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”—1 John iii. 2.

“As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”—Psa. xvii. 15.

PARTIAL knowledge with regard to things seen and temporal, we accept as a condition of our present state. Less patient are we of the veil which hides from us the things which are unseen and eternal; which conceals from us much that we should like to know, about the future world and our condition therein,—our bliss, our capacities, the consummations of our immortal destiny. But all is shadowy. A nimbus of golden mist overhangs the whole scene, like the “bright cloud” which at once veiled and tempered the dazzling splendours of the Transfiguration. It seems to be a very kindness to us, only to be allowed to see such things through a glass darkly. “Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear,

we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

Still we may not hesitate to expect in the glorified state, a great enlargement of our intellectual faculties. That these are in an imperfect and undeveloped state now, we all acknowledge. More than half our errors, and schisms, and doubts, and controversies, are due to the inevitable limitations of the human intelligence. Some truths are absolutely beyond our grasp; and, through unwise attempts to speculate or theorize upon them, men often become, like Milton's fallen angels, confused, distracted, "finding no end, in wandering mazes lost." But, in the heavenly state, we are to believe that, so far as is possible or expedient, these limitations upon our knowledge will be removed. There will be a great Pentecostal outpouring upon the risen spirit:—so that, without aid from books, without instruction from teachers, with no remaining doubts to darken, and with no perplexing mysteries to confound,—immortal minds will exercise themselves on immortal themes, and understand the truth of that word, "in Thy light shall we see light."

What may be the subjects on which these enlarged [and illuminated faculties will be employed, it is not possible to speak with definiteness.

Our Lord Himself teaches that it is of the very essence of the life eternal, to have a perfect knowledge of the Divine character, and of His dealings with us, especially in relation to the scheme of man's redemption. "And this is life eternal," He says, "that they might know Thee, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."* This is a theme of such inexhaustible fulness, that eternity will not be too long for the study of it; whilst as to perfect knowledge of it, there is not an angel near the throne, who does not feel that he has not more to learn. To know the only true and Triune God, in all the deep and searchless mystery of His infinite and everlasting existence,—to behold Him in the unfolded brightness of His perfections, in the unravelled intricacies of His providence, in the unerring wisdom and goodness which have ever characterized His moral administration,—this will be employment enough for the glorified intellect; neither, until it is glorified, will it ever be competent to enter upon the task.

"And Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent:" says the Divine speaker; for on the great subject of mediation, we may believe, new views will break upon us, in the eternal state. There are mysteries, connected with this, which "the angels desire to

* John xvii. 3.

look into."* And we, as learners with them, are content to sit on the same form. To what extent the sacrifice of Christ enters into, and pervades the whole scheme of moral government,—how many worlds are benefited by it, how many orders of responsible beings are interested in it, how far back it may reach into an eternal past, or how far forward into worlds and creations yet to be,—this we certainly do not know now; and, in the present state, it does not seem likely that we ever shall. But the mental element in created natures of all kinds, is a profound enigma. It is wonderful in the forecasting of an ant. It makes a stride, before it reaches the genius of a Newton. The philosopher is but a dwarf in intellectual stature, compared with that of Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. But who shall say what colossal strides, even beyond the mental stature of an angel, the human intelligence may take in the beatific state? We nothing know. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."†

Again, we may not doubt that, in the glorified state, a great change will take place in regard to the sanctification of all our moral and spiritual powers. In our present state, we cannot meditate on any subject, however spiritual and sublime,

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

† 1 John iii. 2.

without a painful sense of weariness and distraction. Before giving to it half the time we could give, ungrudgingly, to any secular pleasure or employment, a thousand influences conspire to draw off our thoughts, and deaden the best feelings of the heart. “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”* was our Lord’s tender remonstrance with His three chosen disciples, in the garden. Was one hour too long for the flesh to deny itself? Was one hour too great a strain upon the spirit, when commanded to watch and pray? But, in heaven, we shall have put off such incumbrances. The spirit will be disengaged from them as entirely as the risen body dispossesses itself of the grave-clothes and the shroud:—dropping off the oppressions of this lower-world service, in order that, winging its emancipated flight into purer regions, it may be made like Christ, and “see Him as He is.”

Where note this last feature of saintly transformation, namely, the power to look with unblenched gaze upon the face of God, and how we become possessed of it. We are made like unto God, and therefore see Him as He is. We stand not upon the order in which we become possessed of these two attributes of the glorified state;—whether it

* Matt. xxvi. 40.

is the continual looking upon Christ, in glory, which begets resemblance, or whether a previously imparted resemblance is a necessary qualification for seeing Him as He is. Perhaps the first is the more obvious reading of the Apostle's words, namely, that the continued looking upon the face of the enthroned Mediator begets a kind of spiritual likeness to Him. This does not seem difficult to conceive. For a sight of the Redeemer, in His glory, would naturally generate wonder, adoration, love. In heaven, God is loved for Himself; for all His high and transcendent excellences. We behold the riches of Christ in all their unsearchableness, His pity in all its boundless tenderness, His holiness in all its jealous and unchanging purity, His love in all its breadth, and length, and depth, and height. And seeing all this, and being brought into close and intimate fellowship with such excellence, we become like unto the thing we look upon, and partake of the ineffable brightness to which we are brought so near. When iron is heated in the furnace, its nature becomes all one with the fire. And, in like manner, when the glorified spirit is joined to Christ, by the one Spirit, he becomes partaker of the Divine nature:—sitting with Christ on His throne, he is both “like Him” and is able to “see Him as He is.”

Or, once more, the likeness spoken of and with it the power to see Christ as He is, may be the likeness of spiritual reflection. We have the thought expanded and illustrated in the Epistle to the Corinthians: where the Apostle tells us, “But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* Yes, just as the face of Moses shone with an unearthly shining, after being confronted with the dazzling glory of the mount, so will the souls of believers be purified by dwelling in the light of heaven. Risen with Christ, exalted with Christ, admitted into the inner circle of His glory, they catch the reflexion of His eternal beams. As they gaze, they approach; as they approach they are transfigured,—changed from fainter likeness to closer likeness, “even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” And it is manifest that our Lord Himself makes this the culminating bliss of the glorified state. For what is the last prayer He puts up for His redeemed, only a few hours before He suffered? Is it that they shall be made higher than the angels? Is it that the rule and authority shall be given them over countless worlds? Is it that they

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

shall be exalted to a throne, higher than any occupied by the principalities and powers of heaven? No, His prayer, runs, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory."* This itself is heaven; neither can we desire any thing more. For, seeing Christ is likeness to Christ; and beholding His glory is partaking of it. Surely with a revelation which tells us so much as this, we may well be content: for if "it doth not yet appear all we shall be, yet we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

* John xvii. 24.

XXVII.

The Disclosures of the Heavenly State.

“Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him?”—Job xxvi. 14.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”—1 Cor. xiii. 12.

“WHAT I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter,”* it was said by our Lord to Peter. The words had a reach of meaning far beyond the limits of that guest-chamber where they were uttered. They announce the great fact of our present imperfect knowledge on all subjects, human or divine. And they promise the advent of a time when this dimness of vision shall pass away, and our minds shall be capacitated for higher disclosures. At present “we know but in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

There are two ways in which we can conceive of an increase to our present amount of know-

* John xiii. 7.

ledge ;—either by an increase in the measure of light vouchsafed to us, or an increase in our powers of apprehension to receive that light. It is probable that the increase will take place in both directions ; that is, not only that there will be an indefinite enlargement of our field of moral vision, but also that there will be given to us new powers of intelligence, new faculties of discernment, new channels of perception,—making us, in the penetration, and clearness, and comprehensive grasp of the glorified intellect, wise as the angels of God :—“ For now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face.”

And on what subjects will these enlarged and clarified intellects be exercised ? On all that could interest, and exalt, and ennable a glorified and immortal spirit. “ Face to face,” we shall see God as He is :—not indeed to perfection ;—angels cannot do *that*. But still, that which we shall see will be a real object, as far as it is beheld at all ; and not a reflexion only ; not a mirage ; not an elaborate ideal conception, arrived at by means of looking “ through a glass darkly.” One element of these glorified faculties to be bestowed upon us, as observed in the last Meditation, will consist in a closer moral resemblance to the Divine nature. We are made like Him. Here

lies the heart of the problem. It is only like which can see like; only spirit which can comprehend spirit; only purity that can look on purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God:":* see Him "face to face:”—with His glories unveiled; with His perfections in blended harmony; His whole moral administration without a flaw, His throne without a cloud.

Again, "face to face" we shall behold the Redeemer in His glory. We know the comfort of seeing the Lord Jesus now, when we can see Him only "through a glass darkly,"—with the quickened eye of faith, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. For we feel, in the exercises of devotion especially, that the glimpse, however imperfect, brings the object of our worship nearer to us. It relieves the mind in its gropings after an incorporeal abstraction. We feel that, in the Incarnation, the Godhead is brought within the grasp of a reverent religious imagination. And when, through grace, we are enabled to say, This Lord is my Lord; this Jesus, the Saviour, is my Saviour; "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine,"—our hearts warm towards Him with all the sentiments of personal love, personal gratitude, the fervid glow of a holy and heavenly

* Matt. v. 8.

friendship. For how can we do otherwise than love Him Who first loved us ? *

But what will be our feelings towards this Saviour, when we behold Him in His glory,—the uplifted centre of all homage, and worship, and honour, and praise ? When we see Him in the full blaze and effulgence of His redemption triumphs,—beholding the stubborn hearts He has subdued by His grace ; the subject worlds He has won by His atonement ; the myriad throngs of celestial beings, all attributing to Him the glory of their salvation ? And then for the risen saint to think within himself, that this all-glorious Being is He Who, from the world of the ungodly, singled out *me*,—brought *me* under the power of His grace ; pitied my weakness ; wept for my blindness ; with His loving corrections made me great ; drew me with cords of love to His heart and throne ; guided me by His counsel, and after that received me unto glory,—“Oh ! the depth of the riches both of the knowledge and the wisdom of God”† in Christ Jesus ! Yes, all this is unsearchable now. It is past our finding out now. The half of the treasures laid up in Christ will never be known while we “see through a glass darkly.” We shall only see them, and

* 1 John iv. 19. † Rom. xi. 33.

only know them, when we see Him “face to face.”

But further, in this new world of light, we shall be brought face to face with ourselves; with the history and mystery of our providential lot;—with the reason of all its changes, the end of all its trials, the design of all those lights and shadows which flitted athwart the path of our spiritual life. We shall see why God sent us trouble; why He fed us with the bread of adversity; why the waters of Marah were made bitter to us; why He humbled us unto tears, at the place Bochim; and why, just as we were thinking our hill was made so strong, He hid His face from us and we were troubled. And we shall see why we were sometimes allowed to bring trouble upon ourselves,—as when we ran for shelter among the trees of the garden; or sat down in desponding mood under the shade of the juniper tree; or chafed and fretted angrily at sight of the smitten and withered gourd; or lingered on the skirts of temptation through “following Christ afar off.” And we shall see the wondrous overruling of all these things, in making the failures of saints to become a means to their greater spiritual proficiency, and making them to rise the higher, on account of a bewailed and pardoned fall.

And we shall be brought "face to face" with all our mistakes in life:—all our foolish choices; all our obstinate self-will; all our impatience to get beforehand of God's purposes; all our making of doors, and forcing of doors, when our true strength would have been to "sit still." And we shall be brought "face to face" with the greatness of our moral dangers and temptations; shall see on what a thread our soul's life hung, and we knew it not; how nigh we had often gone to the edge of the precipice, and some invisible power withheld us, and drew us back; how Satan had desired to "have us that he might sift us as wheat," * but that Christ prayed for us and our faith failed not.

"Face to face," once more, in relation to our mistaken views of the character of many who have gone before:—some whom we have misjudged, by applying to them the hard and fast lines of our narrow theology; some whom we had presumed to think unfit for the kingdom, as not coming up to our standards of vital and experimental godliness; some, whom in very faithlessness we had given up, as beyond the reach of warning, or exhortation, or prayer. But there was more in them than we thought; as we

* Luke xxii. 32.

shall find when we meet them "face to face." And so, in the case of many others who shall meet in that world,—some between whom bitternesses had sprung up, and unkind words had passed, and room had been left for sad family estrangements,—continuing so long as hardly to be closed up, when the grave shut its mouth upon all faults, and silenced for ever all harsh words. Oh! how much better will these estranged and distant ones understand each other, when, in the broad sunlight of the upper world, they see one another's motives "face to face."

Yet more should it heighten our anticipations of the "glory to be revealed," to feel that we shall behold, "face to face," the forms of loved earthly kindred,—shall see them as they are seen, know them as they are known, love them with all the fervour of a pure, a spiritual, a sanctified and everlasting love. True, we cannot know them again in their earthly relationships. These, pure as we may think them, are not pure enough for heaven. Still, love them we shall, and know them we shall. And to see those with whom our souls were knit together as one spirit,—the parents we revered, the husband or wife we loved, the children we trained for the Lord, the brother or friend with whom we took sweet counsel, and

walked to the house of God in company,—aye, to see these, not as we saw them on earth, “through a glass darkly,” but as they are clothed in heaven’s brightest raiment, without spot or blemish, or any such thing,—this is of a truth a soul-inspiring hope. On earth, it may be, our loved one had his one infirmity—a thorn in the flesh, which it cost him many watchings, and many conflicts, and many prayers, to enable him to eradicate and subdue. And now we see that this thorn was his soul’s life, and he is blessing God that it was not taken away. Wherefore, let us judge nothing before the time. The world does not know us. Friends do not always know us. Often we do not know ourselves. All our knowledge, whether of ourselves or of each other, is nothing but broken, refracted, distorted cross-light. “For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.”

XXVIII.

Death and Sorrow Vanquished.

“He will swallow up death in victory ; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.”—Isa. xxv. 8.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. xxi. 4.

If the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, the last remainder of our mortal weakness which shall be taken away is sorrow. And of both the destruction is to be absolute and complete. With regard to death, the strong expression is used by the prophet, “He will swallow up death in victory ;” that is, as the original word implies,—He will absorb it, quench it, annihilate it,—just as something which the sea might bury in its depths, or which fire might decompose into its elemental forms. St. Paul, writing to Timothy, uses an equally remarkable expression with regard to the absolute extinguishment and stamping out of death, as a fact of human experience, saying, “by the appearing of Jesus Christ, Who hath abolished

death, and hath brought life and immortality to light."*

But what is the kind of death of which the second coming of Christ will be the swallowing up? Manifestly not that second death, which in the awful vision of the Apocalypse, is to be visited on all who are not found written in the book of life.† For this, as the ordained portion of the impenitent and unbelieving, must, on all the principles of a righteous moral government, remain fixed and irreversible. It is a death which must reign for ever, since there is no second Christ to break its power; and no other quickening Spirit to give back to the soul its self-destroyed and forfeited life.

Still scope enough for the exercise of this prerogative, and field wide enough for the fulfilment of this saying concerning it, will be found, if we interpret the words concerning death to mean that, even in relation to the present state,—so far as relates to the power of death to deliver us over to condemnation, to detain us in its iron captivity, to separate us from the fellowships of the heavenly world, and even its power to affright the soul with life-long terror and dread,—this death is swallowed up in victory. As a physical experience; as an element in our moral probation; as the ordained

* 2 Tim. i. 10. † Rev. xx. 14.

penalty of sin which was to pass upon all men, in all those senses, death must last as long as time lasts :—the poor privilege being conceded to him, that, as a disarmed and discrowned potentate, he is the last enemy that shall be destroyed. But destroyed he shall be, and that utterly. One who has walked through his dark valley, has turned the gloom of its shadows into morning : and made his portals the entrance-gate to the temple of endless life. And from that temple we shall go no more out. Death hath no more dominion over us. A sceptre of feebleness is now the sceptre of his kingdom, and, with the first appearing of the Advent Saviour, his dynasty passes away. “He will swallow up death in victory.”

But the half is not told us of Messiah’s victories. And therefore, the prophet goes on to tell us that, at His coming, “the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.” The promise is assuring. The same forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into our world, brought therewith all our woe. If we had not known death, we had not known tears. But now God “feeds us with the bread of tears, and gives us tears to drink in great measure.”* Tears in “great measure,” and for many reasons. There are tears for the infirmities,

* Psa. lxxx. 5.

and miseries, and sufferings of the body :—for the sicknesses that lay aside from usefulness, for the pain that irritates and unfits for duty, for the premature decay and feebleness which make us old before our time. And then there are tears for the harass, and sorrow, and disquietude which vex the spirit ;—for disappointed hopes, and failing plans, and wrongful injuries and friends' unkindness ; for the one great mistake of a life, which drew a thousand mistakes in its train ; for the one blight or sorrow of a life, which cast a dark shadow over the rest of its days.

Then there are tears for all the shortcomings and misdoings of the soul ;—for all its sins, negligences, and ignorances : for all those remembered things, in its past history, which come up again and again : which defy the power of a resolved oblivion : which flit, like mocking spectres, before the guilty imagination, making us to say with David,—“ My sin is ever before me.” And for sins of infirmity there are tears also :—for the mind’s impatience, for the heart’s rebellion, for the spirit’s earthly and cold affections :—for evil tempers when they arise, evil passions when they rule, evil thoughts, when like vipers, they fasten upon the soul, and we can neither shake them off, nor pray them off :—for coldness

in holy exercises, for a distracting carefulness about worldly things, for a disposition to fret against God, when the gourd which He had given us for an undeserved and unexpected shelter, is, with a purpose equally kind and wise, commanded to be cut down and withered.

Now these tears, in the day of the Lord's appearing, will all have been wiped away from off all faces. Speaking of that day, in another chapter, we have Isaiah saying, "The inhabitants of that land shall not say, I am sick: and the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."* Here we have sickness and sin,—sorrow-stains and guilt-stains, set forth as the fruitful source and spring-head of the tears on all faces. But they will all disappear when the iniquity disappears. "In those days and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."† But what has caused the vanishing away of all these sin-stains? Why, as the prophet further teaches, the purifying influences of sanctified affliction. "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin."‡ Yes, in this way, God debates with us, when in measure the

* Isa. xxxiii. 24.

† Jer. 1. 20.

‡ Isa. xxvii. 9.

chastening shooteth forth. East wind or rough wind,—the staying of the one, or the letting loose of the other,—they are all parts of a scheme of discipline, merciful devices for our profit, heaven's corrective methods for keeping the heart right.

And who will not acknowledge the need of such pruning, if trees of righteousness are to bring forth lasting fruit? We often sleep, and we require some sharp sickness to arouse us. We decline, and go back, and get drawn into the world, and we need some arresting or warning sorrow to set us upon the serious heart-questions, “Where art thou?” “What doest thou here?” We are suffering our affections to become entwined, more and more, round some earthly idol. We cannot live without it. We could live without the realized smile of God sooner. Ah! can we? Then a holy and merciful God will try us herein. He hides His face, and we are troubled. A great affliction befalls us, and our accustomed supports fail us. The desire of our eyes is taken away, and the blank heart looks out upon a blank world. But all this chastening is for our profit, that thereby the Father of our spirits may make us “partakers of His holiness.” The tears are to make sure our part in Messiah's victory. Only, while giving way to them, we must see to it that patience have her

perfect work ; and that troubles be allowed to fulfil their merciful and sacred mission. Affliction is a monitor, and must make us think. It is a rod, and must make humble. It is a fire, and must burn up all the dross and corruptions of the earthly mind. It is a load-stone, sent to draw the wearied and over-burdened spirit nearer and nearer to Him, at Whose presence “death will be swallowed up in victory; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

Fail we not, however, to notice, that this promise, like all our Advent promises, belongs to believers in Christ Jesus. And to believers only. As there is a death, which Christ has not swallowed up, so there are tears, which the Lord God has not promised to wipe away. Such are those which come of that sorrow of the world which worketh death ; which are forced from the eyes, only in the near prospect of an eternal world ; which come not of any hatred of sin, but of an awful apprehension of its consequences ; which are only the unavailing expression of remorse, and outdying hope. Godly sorrow,—the sorrow of health, and spared life, and present opportunity, “ worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of.”* Like David, the penitent may say, “ All the night make I my bed to swim, and water my couch with my

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

tears : " but they are the tears, not of the bruised heart only, but of humble faith, and kindling hope, and awakened gratitude to Him, Who, at His coming, has promised to wipe all tears away. Such an one is able to look upon death as the beginning of life; upon the pains of mortality, as the ending of all other pains. One is He Who vanquishes death and vanquishes sorrow also. "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces."

XXIX.

The New Heavens and the New Earth.

“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—2 Pet. iii. 13.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.”—Rev. xxi. 1.

A CHARACTERISTIC difference between the speculations which unassisted philosophy has put forth, in regard to the future world, and the views which we get from Scripture, is that the marked feature of the philosophical future, at least for all moral purposes, is destruction. The chief characteristic of the Bible future state is renovation. Human philosophy, for the most part, sweeps the whole materialism of God’s work away. The body does not rise. The earth’s ruins are never collected together again. And the human spirit, in all the oblivion of a lost or destroyed identity, knows nothing of its former self. The Bible, on the other hand, instructs us that every thing which God has made, shall stand. Substances may change, may take new forms, may subsist under

other and totally different conditions, but they cannot perish utterly. This body has a high destiny, because Christ has dwelt in it. And this earth has a high destiny, because Christ has walked on it. The one, after passing through the purging ordeal of the grave, shall be quickened into a sanctified and immortal creation; whilst the other will submit to the melting of the last dissolving fire, only to see, rising from its ashes, a gorgeous universe of order, and light, and love. Hence, in the Revelation, we read: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

"A new earth." The expression favours the belief that there will be a 'materialism' of some sort in the world to come; that it will not be a spiritual world and nothing else. At first, we do not take kindly to this idea. We seem to imagine that matter is so essentially impure, as to be incapable of subsisting in intimate and enduring fellowship with spiritual creatures, or a spiritual world. But where do we learn this? Surely that earth which Adam sprung from, which the Angel of the Covenant walked on, which awoke the anthems of the "morning stars," and drew "shoutings from the sons of God," could not have been unclean in itself. And, since the first

earth was compatible with all the bliss, needful for Adam not yet fallen, what should hinder there being a new earth, equipped with all the elements of bliss, for the children of Adam, redeemed and raised? No; the Lord's arm is not shortened. However impregnated with man's sin may be the entire materialism of this lower world, the purging ordeal is ready for separating the precious from the vile:—so that, when this visible creation becomes, as we know it one day will, a stupendous ruin; a second chaos of confusion, and dust, and wreck,—the same voice which, at the first, said “Let there be light,” will say, “Let there be order, let there be beauty, let ‘the light of the moon be as the light of the sun, and let the light of the sun be sevenfold,’ and let the first heaven and the first earth pass away.”

Not much, in the way of positive information, it is allowed, does this give us as to the nature of the heavenly world. But it does emphasize this feature of it, that it will be characterised by reconstruction, rather than by annihilation. The distinction is further expressed in those sublime words of Him that sitteth upon the throne,—“Behold I make all things new:” *—destroying nothing, but adapting all existing things to new conditions. Such a view

* Rev. xxi. 5.

leaves room for the possibility that all that is pure in our earthly delights, all that is noble in our earthly faculties, all that is great and glorious in earthly form, may be found, in enlarged and ever-enlarging measure in the new world of the paradise of God. Even this earth is too divine a thing to perish altogether. In a mould, formed of its sacred atoms, was cast a child of immortality. And shall Satan now triumph in its destruction? No: let him take the shell and crust of its corruption; the impurity and dross that shall ooze out of it, as it passed through the liquid Advent fire. But the earth itself, that earth which oft-times had been a pillow to the eternal Son of God, which had received His tears, had become vocal with His blood, had enshrined for three days the incorrupt temple of His Incarnation,—this can no more die than man himself can die. It shall have a resurrection with him:—“ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

“ Wherein dwelleth righteousness,”—for this, after all, is the aspect of the new creation which it most concerns us to dwell upon,—namely, its perfect purity; its stern exclusion of every thing that defileth; the utter oblivion, by every spirit that enters it, of all the evil of his lower life, as if

he had never known what sin was: as if that repaired moral image of his had never been broken. And his soul now, like a polished mirror, has no breath upon it,—not of passion, not of care, not of irregular or uncurbed desire. All its faculties and powers work in harmony with each other,—subordinated as the stars in their courses; commingling as the hues of the rainbow; consentaneous as the harps of God. The tumults of earth rage not, neither are the strifes of time heard. The new heavens are the abode of universal peace, eternal sanctity. “Therein dwelleth righteousness.”

“Righteousness,”—because “Jesus Christ, the righteous,” dwells there; reigns in those new heavens and fills them. And we shall be His servants. And we shall look upon Him, and be made like unto Him, and lay our crowns at His feet, and shall see Him as He is. He will appear to us there as the visible and embodied type of consummate holiness, infinite rectitude, eternal truth. The marks of the spear and the nails, not effaced even there from the form of His glorified humanity, will be to us an ever-present monument of what sin is,—and what the love of God is,—and how Jesus must have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, before He could thus have put

forth His hand to deliver, or laid his honour in the dust to save.

“Wherein dwelleth righteousness,”—because the Holy and sanctifying Spirit of God dwells there. And He is the source of all righteousness. He is the Lord and Giver of life. He quickened the first earth from chaos, that it might be the abode of innocence. He will quicken the new earth at the dissolution, that it may be the abode of righteousness. And of all spiritual life He is the Author also. Angels and archangels stand not in their own purity. They are maintained, in their immortality, by the power of the Spirit of God. And whether now or hereafter, our upholding must come of the same Spirit. We drew from Him our first spiritual breath. When we were first quickened from the death of sin, when we first felt our need of a Saviour, when we first began to repent, and turn, and believe, and pray, when we first felt drawn to Christ and to love Him,—all this was the work of the Holy Spirit. And to continue this work, in the new creation, will be His also. The one task of eternity will be that which has to be begun here,—the making us like unto Christ. And in the never-ending years, it will be the office of the Blessed Spirit to make the portraiture more complete:—to keep us so near to

Jesus, that by continual looking and continual loving we may become transformed into the likeness : “ But we all,” says the Apostle, “ with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” *

“ Wherein dwelleth righteousness ;”—for there dwell the Angels of God ; those pure and unfallen natures, with whom service is delight, and obedience is repose, and holiness is an instinct, and righteousness is the element in which they live, and move, and have their being. And with them dwell also those who are made like unto the angels,—the souls of the righteous, the spirits of just men made perfect, the men of faith, and love, and trust, and prayer, the religious patriots of all ages,—confessors, valiant for the truth ; martyrs, lying under the altar ; intercessors who stood between the living and the dead till the plague was stayed. “ All these are standing in their lot : ” walking in their uprightness ; waiting for us who are to come after, that they, without us, should not be made perfect. And the signal for this general assembling will be, when time shall be no longer ; when a thick gloom shall gather over the sun’s faded disk ; when the heavens shall be folded up as a garment, and

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

the earth shall stoop, under her years, as a shock of corn in its season. Then shall be inaugurated the reign of universal sinlessness; the final obliteration, from the souls of God's elect, of all defect, or blemish, or spot, or any such thing; the setting up of Messiah's throne in "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Wherefore, taking up the language of the Apostle, "seeing that all these things,"—these present and visible things, "shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." "Every man that hath this hope in him," says another Apostle, "purifieth himself even as He is pure."* Two cannot dwell together except they agree. Unless righteousness dwell with us in the old earth, we cannot dwell with righteousness in the new. Meetness for the higher state is not to be commenced and perfected in the transit between two worlds. The work, so far as respects the essentials of religious character, is life's work, and never is life found too long for it. For in what does this work consist? Why it is to bruise the serpent's head within us. It is to break down the tyranny of the carnal mind. It is to enable us to separate ourselves from the corrupting fellowships of this present world. It is to cultivate

* 1 John iii. 3.

the dispositions, proper to the renewed and converted mind. In a word, it is to be, year by year, and day by day, trying to make all things new,— putting on the “new man,” trying to learn the “new song,” endeavouring to trace in our hearts the “new name written,” and looking with confidence and joy to the time, when we shall behold the “new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

XXX.

The End of all Things.

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”—1 Pet. iv. 7.

“And sware by Him that liveth for ever and ever, Who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.”—Rev. x. 6.

THE expression “near at hand,” or its equivalents, when used in Scripture of some event to happen in the future, is not to be interpreted according to the standard of our human calendars. When, in the Epistle to the Philippians, we read, “The Lord is at hand;” or in one of the closing chapters of the Revelation, “Behold, I come quickly;” or in the general Epistle of James, “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh;”—the proximity spoken of is to be measured only by the heavenly time-tables. Near and remote, quickly and slowly, are mere terms of relation,—to be interpreted according to the faculties of the apprehending mind. An event to take place at the end of a century of centuries, would, to our finite

faculties, be infinitely and inconceivably remote : but it would be near at hand to Him, with Whom “ one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.” We must dismiss, therefore, from our reckonings altogether all computations based on this world’s almanacs, when we come to such announcements as those just recited. They affirm the infallible certainty of the event, and that at a pre-determined time,—even to the day and hour. But that “ day and hour ” are not known to us,—are not known even to the angels of God. With all the stretch of their heaven-gifted intellect, they know no more than Peter did when he wrote these words,—“ the end of all things is at hand.”

Among things included in this announcement of the Apostle, we may suppose him to mean first that ‘the end of time itself is at hand ;’—the end of chronicles and calendars ; the end of all reckonings by years, and months, and weeks, and days. Time had a beginning of life, and so, like other such creations, it must have an end of days. It was born ; and so it must die. We know when it was born. It started into being on that first morning of creation, when the young fresh light fell on the void and mis-shapen world. And by that light, time has measured its course ever

since;—by revolving suns, and waning crescents, and changing shadows, registering its length of days. When these die, time will die. When the sun and the moon are darkened, and the earth doth wax old as doth a garment, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the sands in the glass of time will have run out, for there will be nothing by which to mark its course.

Nor will there be any need for noting its course, in the eternal state. We note time here, because our days are numbered; and sometimes we would fain make the enquiry, how long we have to live? We would watch the dwindling of life's daily contracting span, and tell off, on our fingers, our being's brief remainder. But, in a condition of being, where there is no remainder;—where no length of retrospect lessens the stretch of the illimitable future,—when yesterdays are not, and morrows are not, the life running on in one continuous, indivisible, everlasting now,—we shall take no heed to gliding years, but leave eternity's deep stream to flow on, unnoticed and without sign. “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by Him that liveth for ever and ever, Who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things

that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer."

But look at the language of St. Peter as it points to the closing and sealing up of all moral opportunity. When the end of all things come, there will be an end of everything we can do for our souls. "Everything;" for it will be the end of repentance, and faith, and prayer, and self-denial, and holy effort; the end of all the possibilities of conversion, conviction, sanctification, renewal in the spirit of our minds;—the end of our day of visitation; the end of our accepted time; the end of that "time and times and half a time," within whose defined and inexorable limits, mercy can be sought for, or acceptance found. Indeed this is a feature of the end which comes before the end of which the Apostle speaks. Practically, it supervenes upon the close of life. For since "there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest,"*—since the tree must lie, where it falls, and as it falls,—it follows that in the likeness in which we lie down, in that shall we rise again: "he that is unjust to be unjust still, and he that is filthy to be filthy still."†

* Eccl. ix. 10. † Rev. xxii. 11.

Yield we not then, to the delusive expectation, with which some would cheat us, of a second probation after death; or of a universal gaol delivery at some period in the great hereafter. The state of the impenitent after death is one of finality. Once out of this world, and unsaved, neither sight, nor sound, nor touch can ever reach their souls for good again:—no fast, no festival, no preaching of the word of exhortation. No angel anthem will ever reach the mansions of that Christless world; no preacher there will proclaim the glad tidings of peace and good will to men;—no countless congregations of redeemed and pardoned souls will send up there the heart-thrilling strain: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” There will be an end of holy fellowships; an end of united supplication; an end of the preached word; an end of every agency, Divine or human, which could avail to convert the soul. The sound has gone forth of an irreversible consummation. “The end of all things is come.” “Time shall be no longer.”

“No longer.” How obvious the duty of spending our time conscientiously and well while it lasts: the necessity of subjecting all our relaxations from severer employments, to a law of chastened religious moderation:—so that the amount of

time we shall give to our business, the amount we shall give to our recreations, the amount we shall give to our family, our friends, our own mental and moral improvement, shall all be dealt out according to a law, which has respect unto the end, and to the account which we must give at the end. Observe how the words of St. Peter follow on. “The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober.” “Be sober,” says the Apostle. Do not yield to extravagance, or excitement, or inordinate excess in anything. Have modest aims, and keep to them. Sober plans, sober expectations, sober enjoyments,—these are the best preparation for “the end,” as well as the best provision for failure or disappointment, which may befall you before the end comes. “But this I say brethren,” writes the Apostle to the Corinthians, “the time is short. It remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none: and they that weep as though they wept not: and they that buy as though they possessed not: and they that use this world as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.”* Passeth away,—as a shadow that departeth, as a dream when one awaketh, as a stage scene when the curtain falls.

* 1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

The lesson for us, however, is that we live as those who look for something after the shadow; who know there is a reality that will outlive the dream; a world of stupendous facts to be disclosed, when that time-curtain draws up again. And, in view of our preparation for these, we shall all find that we have neither time to waste, nor time to spare. Many a thriftless time-killer has wished he could only be allowed to bring some of his dead hours to life again. He sighs for them to enable him to get ready for the last stern encounter; to brace up his energies for the plunge into the dark river; to enable him to recover strength before he goes hence and is no more seen.

But let us look at the picture from its brighter side. What will be the end of all things to the righteous? Why to them it will be an end of difficulty, and darkness, and fear, and doubt. They shall see spiritual things no more "through a glass darkly," but face to face,—beholding, in all the brightness of His unveiled glory, Him the uncreated Beauty, Him the Eternal Truth. And they will feel it to be the end of all temptation, and sin, and danger of falling away. Once beyond the limits of this visible scene, there shall be no more hazard of their salvation; no more distressing doubts, about their interest in the love

of Christ; no more consciousness of sin's hateful and defiling stain; no more conflicts with the adversaries of their hope and peace. They shall feel that "their warfare is accomplished," that their "iniquities are pardoned," that they have "received at the Lord's hand double for all their sins."*

Thus, to them, the end of all things is but the making of all things new. Time is but the exit-gate out of which they pass to mansions of undecaying bliss; the troubled estuary which they leave to enter upon the glorious open of an eternal sea; the day-break which is to usher in that unclouded brightness, when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days." In that light we shall see light. We shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. Vails, shadows, accommodating and glare-softening clouds,—we shall have done with all these. "The end of all things is come."

* Isa. xl. 2.



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